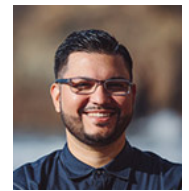


Finding the Plot: A Primer for Youth Workers



D. A. Horton

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Larry Acosta: Hey, urban youth workers, this is Larry welcoming you back. I'm here with D. A. and we've been so thrilled just to see what God has been doing through this discipleship toolkit, and we trust, in this next story, it's gonna be truly equipping. You've seen a progression throughout the series; and this one on defending our faith, that's urban apologetics, man. This is crazy, you know, some of our kids that have come to Christ and are being rooted and grounded where we're giving them some truth and answers for the hope that is within them. And so this series, man, is so critical, D. A., to the whole discipleship process; because now it's not just loading the basics of the faith and teaching some of the practical ways to live it out, now we're actually inviting young people to have real tools so that they can be those messengers of hope to their generation and other people that aren't necessarily gonna always agree with the Judeo-Christian faith that we all share.

And so, maybe share, a little bit from your heart. You know, when there's a reason why you are so committed to urban apologetics, you want people to have that kind of strength and courage to have those fierce conversations or those humble conversations that they need to have with folks who don't necessarily share our faith. But talk for a little bit about—as you develop the content—the theme, and how you broke it down, and equip our youth workers for how to best utilize this.

D. A. Horton: Yeah, absolutely. You know, as I was new to the faith, passionate about evangelism, learning how to become a disciple, as I would begin to share my faith on the streets or even in school, man, there were people that had belief systems that I knew in theory about, like maybe they said, "I'm a Muslim" or "I'm a Mormon", or this, that, and the third; and I didn't really know enough about their faith to say, "Okay, so you believe this, but this is where it contradicts the Bible." All I knew was what Christians believed, and I'm like, okay, so I wouldn't even know

how to navigate through those conversations, and they would end in standstills. And so often I even felt like I didn't do a good job communicating what the Bible says about what that person was communicating to me, and so I was like, man, what would it look like to help students grapple with material where they can learn at a thirty-thousand-foot view what maybe five different movements that are in the city today kind of propagate to young people so when the students, youth leaders, are out there engaging in conversations with a Muslim or somebody from the Jehovah's Witnesses or the LGBT community, they'll have some type of an introductory framework to say, "Ah, okay, so that's what you believe," and they'll know how to ask engaging questions when those who don't share our faith are questioning our faith.

So the whole issue is not to go out there and win arguments. Larry, you know and I know, the Bible never tells us to go win arguments, but basically in 1 Peter 3:15, it just tells us, man, when people question our faith, when they question the reason why we believe in Christ, all we're called to do is not fight them, not to be combative. We want to basically have a conversation and in gentleness, in humility say, "Man, I know you disagree, but let me just show you this is what the Bible says. This is what I'm convinced, this is truth. Though you may reject it, it's not gonna shake the foundation I stand on, and I respect you. We can agree to disagree, but I at least want you to be presented with what the truth of the Scriptures say and teach."

Larry Acosta: Yeah, I really appreciate you sharing that because we, in no way, are trying to empower and equip kids to go out there and give God a black eye by starting all these arguments and just, you know, kind of with this edge to us. You know, we want to have healthy conversations, and so I really appreciate, you know, that you address that. And so youth workers, it's not at all about creating these kids with this knowledge to go out and beat people up with it. Man, have those conversations in your group so that they're equipped with the knowledge but they have a humility, and yet courage and boldness when necessary, to go out and share their own personal convictions.

But, D. A., this whole thing about urban apologetics and being able to defend our faith, it's not just about giving answers to others, but it's also about young people feeling confident in what they believe, as it's rooted and grounded in the truth of Scripture. And so it even means helping kids think biblically a little bit. But how did that go down on your journey? You know, how did you learn to

think biblically or who helped you in that process?

D. A. Horton: Yeah, it was the youth leaders that were pouring into my life, man. Like, they would, you know, really kind of hit some of the belief systems that I had built up actually through rap music, man, like I remember the music I used to listen to before I was saved, man, it just filled me with a worldview that was against the Scripture, that it just denounced Jesus Christ, you know. It propagated Jesus being a blond-haired, blue-eyed white dude that had nothing to do with Latinos and African Americans and Asians, like, man, that's for the white people. Forget Jesus. This is da, da, da, da. And so I was working through those things at a young age and I would believe what the rappers were saying because they were confident in their delivery; and I didn't see a lot of Christians engaging with confidence with the Scriptures and countering what the rappers were saying. But my youth leaders, one in particular, man, he just took me under his wing and he said, "Man, don't listen to what this dude is saying because the Bible says this and this dude doesn't even live by his convictions and da, da, da." And they would just work through the material I was taking in through my music.

And I didn't realize that, man, the world was offering me an apologetic for the world system that is set up against Christ, and that's the key for apologetics is that we want the students to understand everyone around them is searching for God, but they've missed Christ. So we want the students to be equipped with the knowledge through your help, youth leaders, to say, "Look, help the people that you're conversating with know that they're searching for God, but we have the answer for Christ and they're missing Christ." So how does what they believe kind of put Christ on the back burner or move Christ out of the conversation when we say, *Christ is the conversation*. And that helps the young people learn to engage with people while respecting their journey for looking for God. We can correct them by giving them the truth from the Word of God; and that's what I think the youth leaders helped me understand is that when my homies were on the block or when the Muslims were coming at me with different forms of urban Islam, I would say, "This is where they're off when it comes to Jesus," because Jesus is the divisive name. People can say, "I love God. I believe God. I can go to church. I go to temple. I go to mosque. I go to this." But when you inject Jesus, that's the definitive, that's the dividing line, and so with that we want them to say, "Man, I respect your search for God, but man, what are your thoughts on Jesus?" We always want the conversation to

come back to Christ.

Larry Acosta: And I know that in this entire series, each time as you address each faith or cult that some might consider, you really are trying to help them understand who Jesus is, how these other faiths and -isms see Jesus; and you're trying to lift up Jesus and what the truth is of Scripture and that, you know, that is so helpful in each of these conversations that you have taught on.

So in closing here, talk for a moment to the youth worker. There's a youth worker out there, obviously in a brief little spark video and in the brief content here, it's not designed to be a full-blown course on Mormonism or Catholicism, or what have you. And so maybe . . . what would you suggest to the youth worker that's out there that goes, "Whoa, yeah, you started addressing it, but I'm still not proficient enough to answer every question related to that, "and what tools would you direct them to or what advice would you give them for they might still feel a little intimidated to have these conversations.

D. A. Horton: Yeah, I would say this. Hear from my heart. Everything I know about God I didn't learn at once. It's a progression. And so for you this may be an introduction to a faith or a system of beliefs that sets itself up against the personal work of Christ, and this is your introductory as much as the students, so now there's that common ground with the student to say, hey, we're on this journey together. So as you brainstorm and dialogue through conversations, you're gonna have the opportunity again to admit humility, admit limitations, and show them that a good apologist is not trying to win arguments, but to say "That's a good question; I don't have the answer to that right now. Let me go and research. You go and research. Let's come back together. Gather in conversation. Let's learn in community about what the Bible says, what the work of Christ looks like in light of what that opposing voice is saying about Christ." And it's a learning process that you're not going to learn at once, because I'm still learning.

And every person that you have a dialogue with who may attribute themselves to this specific faith or they affirm their, you know, alignment with a specific movement, you're gonna see that everyone has different belief systems, even individually. So it's gonna help you to remember, specifically for the students, to learn to treat people as individuals. Don't just write them off because of what their affiliation is with a religion or movement, but you can see them as an individual and direct all their attention back to the

personal work of Jesus Christ.

Larry Acosta: Fantastic. I know there have been times when I had a friend who came to faith in Jesus out of a Mormon lifestyle or background, rather, and one time I had him come to share his story and that was really powerful for students. Other times there have been times when we've had to just do additional research and find the answers to some of these questions. And sometimes it's looking at what the Jehovah's Witness Bible says versus, you know, what we would say is more of a mainline biblical translation, you know, and comparing the Scriptures and interpretation.

And so, youth workers, you're not gonna have all the answers all at once, but we'll hope you'll take this journey and be reminded that as your young people have been growing along this discipleship journey, there's gonna be some opposition. The enemy, man, he's gonna try to punk them, he's gonna try to send opposition to discourage them. There's gonna be times they're gonna be in a science class and there's a professor or a teacher that is gonna, you know, really be demeaning and put down anybody that claims, you know, claims that they follow Christ or believe in the Bible, and so again, youth workers, your role is critical here. And your role as a teacher, as a shepherd, as an encourager, as a fellow learner, is so vital to this whole defending the faith process, and so as you tackle this series, it's gonna be powerful. It's gonna be very equipping in orientation. And so, go for it, man. Have those conversations; equip those kids with what you know, and when you don't know it, as D. A. said, "Hey, that's great. I'm gonna write it down. I'll do some research this week. Let's figure it out together."

And so, again, youth workers, thank you for who you are. Thank you for helping kids have these critical conversations. You are making disciples and the world's a better place for it. God bless you guys on this continued journey.