

What, Why, How?

Todd Jones

WHAT, WHY, HOW?



**A QUICK HOW-TO
ON MISSION, VISION, AND
PLAN OF ATTACK WITHIN
YOUTH MINISTRY**

Chapter 1

Where do I start? Where did I go wrong? How do I do this? Why do I feel so lost? Those are all questions that I have heard from new youth directors and youth pastors. They launched a youth ministry with passion and a heart for students and the first few youth groups were amazing! But after awhile they didn't really see any change in the group, no growth, no new excitement, just the same ole same ole. No matter how hard they tried and how awesome of an event they threw it felt like they were stuck in a rut or just spinning their wheels. Well, in fact, they were.

I lived in the city of my birth until I moved to college. I didn't go too far, about an hour and a half away, but far enough to where I didn't know anybody and didn't know where anything was. It didn't take long before on campus living and cafeteria food (although it was pretty good!) just wasn't going to cut it! I needed, and when I say "needed" I mean NEEDED, a large carne asada burrito. So I got in my car and set out to find somewhere to buy one. I figured if I took off driving I was bound to find somewhere to get one, but it turned out that all I did was get lost. Unfortunately, this was just barely before the generation of smart phones and I couldn't just ask Siri to find me a burrito and get me back to school. I had set out with all the ambition in the world but, alas, I didn't know where I was going and I got lost. I realized very quickly that in this new place I needed to know where I was going and how to get there.

The same goes for youth ministry. So many times I talk to youth workers that have all the ambition in the world and they set out to do amazing youth ministry but end up lost and confused. The problem isn't that they just don't want it bad enough, or that God hasn't given them a passion for youth, or the ability to relate to youth.

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The problem is that they don't know where they are going, why they are doing it, and how to get there. Eventually, all the passion and energy they have just results in spinning wheels, using a lot of gas, making a lot of noise, but going nowhere.

A few months ago I ran into a youth director buddy of mine who had just taken over his first youth ministry. He had grown up in youth group and had volunteered at multiple youth ministries but this was his first time leading a youth ministry where he was the main guy. I remembered when he first found out that he had gotten the job. He was so passionate and so excited to start his new adventure. I encouraged him and celebrated with him while trying to help him and guide him in what to expect as the main youth guy. About 6 months later I ran into him and while I could still tell he had a passion for youth he just looked worn out. He quickly asked if we could meet sometime for lunch so he could pick my brain. When we met for lunch we started by casually talking as we ate our fish tacos. I began by simply asking him "So what is your mission within your youth ministry?". He kind of looked at me sideways and said "well, I guess just to do youth group and teach them about Jesus", then he paused for a second and shrugged while he mumbled "I don't know". I wasn't surprised by his answer at all. A lot of youth workers really have no clue what their mission is and in turn have no clue as to what to do to accomplish it.

So many youth workers DO a lot but nothing goes together, and they can't tell you a reason why they are doing what they are doing. Practically they may be throwing a great event but when it comes to the purpose of that event in order to fulfill their mission they have no clue. They are just doing it for the sake of doing it and while their hearts are in the right place not a lot is getting accomplished.

I am not saying that without having a clear mission, vision, and plan of attack you cannot succeed because ultimately the growth is going to come from God. I have seen youth workers that are a total mess organizationally, structurally, and even practically who have students flock to their ministry and watch it thrive. God is in control of your ministry and He is the one that brings the growth and change. I want you to know that what I am about to teach you is not a fix all, and people can succeed without ever thinking about this. However, understanding this will help you get a better grasp on how things work and help in getting you traction from that "spinning your wheels" feeling.

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So lets get started. The first thing you need to do is ask yourself a series of questions, and of course ask God that same series of questions to get His vision for your ministry as well. You need to simply ask yourself...

1. Why am I doing this?
2. Where am I going?
3. How do I get there?

The basic answers to these questions are the framework to creating a mission, vision, and practical plan of attack. If you cannot answer these questions you may have found the reason that sometimes things within the youth ministry feel hopeless and you are beginning to feel burnt out. This mission, vision, and plan of attack will become the driving force to your ministry and it will serve as not only a road map for you but also a quick way to let new volunteers know what the ministry is about, let other people in the church know, and prove to your senior pastor that you are not JUST a youth person scraping to get by.

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Why?

Mission

Why are you doing what you are doing? Yes, the answer to this question is Jesus, and that needs to be the actual reason behind why you are doing it. To be cool with the students, or to relive high school, or just because you want people to see you as a leader are not sufficient reasons. Your true motive should be that Jesus Christ has changed your life and He has called you to tell others about Him. But, moving past that concrete fact, (because if that one isn't true then you should step down from youth ministry) why are you doing what you are doing...what is your mission?

I played baseball through college and the mission of our team was very clear. The coach would drive it into us at every opportunity. We could all repeat it and knew what we needed to do to accomplish it. But it all began with clearly defining why we were there. It was to “work together as a team and play to win”. Nothing that you wouldn't expect for a college baseball team to want to do, but we put it in a clear statement that everyone could remember and know. When that became our goal we could fill in the how.

The same goes for our ministries. We need to clearly define what our mission is so that we have something to work from. The mission should be the driving force behind everything that we do in the ministry. As harsh as it sounds, if we are doing something and we can't figure out how it fits into accomplishing our mission, then we shouldn't be doing it. Every single activity, group, and message should be planned with the mission in mind and should answer the question, “does this work to accomplish our mission?”

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So, what is your mission? Only you can answer this. I believe that God has given us some very strong guidelines in what we should be doing, and He has also gifted us all differently but you need to figure out what that looks like. Some might say “We exist to Biblically nurture the youth within our church.” That is a fine mission. Personally, I don't think that is all God has called us to do but if that's what you believe God is leading you to do within your ministry then make that your mission and do everything to accomplish that mission.

Take some time to think about what you want to accomplish. Think about what God has called you to do, what you would like to see happen within your group, etc. Write down these ideas...

(Examples: Reach students, serve our community, teach biblically, grow in knowledge, guide students, love students, make disciples, lead, send etc.)

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Now take what you have written and combine the highlights of it into one cohesive sentence. This will become the mission of your group.

For reference, here is the mission statement that I use for my youth ministries...

“To reach lost students for Christ and guide them into a REAL relationship with Him, themselves, and others.”

It is one simple sentence that is packed with meaning and direction. We want to reach lost students. Just plain and simple we want to reach lost students wherever they are, and no matter how lost they are. We want to reach them but not just for the purpose of connecting or building our group. We want to reach them for Christ. It's our goal to reach students for the purpose of introducing them to Jesus, praying that they accept Him into their lives. Once they have done that we don't just kick them out, we care for them and their spiritual well being by guiding them into His family through a relationship with Him. It is our goal that they would not just learn how to fake it but that they would learn to have a REAL relationship with Him, and also learn to have a REAL relationship with others in the church, all while being honest with themselves about their standing in Christ and understanding what Christ has done for them.

That is the mission we use, and if that fits into what you feel God has called your ministry to do then feel free to use every word of it and make it your own. But if you feel God is calling you to do something different, or to word it differently for your culture and community, then do what God is calling YOU to do.

The mission is not rocket science, and most of you have an idea of what it is but you may have never put it down on paper and used it to its full potential.

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Once you have created this mission statement, memorize it! Make it a part of your everyday vocabulary, and teach it to your volunteers so that if anyone at any time asks “Hey what's the youth ministry all about” it can be stated simply in one sentence. Once this statement is created then everything that follows in the ministry can be measured against this, and you can ask yourself “does what we just did fit into the mission of our ministry?”.

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Where are you going?

Vision

Now that you know why you're doing ministry and you have established a mission for your ministry, it is time to figure out where that mission is going to take you. This can be described as the, “how we will act” or “what type of environment we will create”. There are many different moods or environments that are created within youth ministries but for this step you need to look at your mission and see what you will need to do in order to accomplish it. In other words, where are you going?

Every youth group has a different “feel” to it due to a lot of different factors. The students in your group, the leaders in your group, the personality of the main youth leader, the location of the city you are in, the culture of the church are all factors. One of the main driving factors needs to be, what type of environment is going to help you carry out the mission of your ministry? What VISION do you have for how students will feel when they walk through the doors?

In order to fulfill your mission you will need to inform and train your leaders and volunteers on what they can do to create that environment. This can be one of the hardest things to do, especially if you are taking over a youth ministry that may already have a temperature set. Your mission might be to “Reach lost students” and the vision that you are striving for is “a place where everyone is welcome” but the environment that is already set, and is understood in the community is “uninviting and cold” or “You're not welcome in our club”. I am not going to lie to you and say that creating a new environment out of one that already exists is easy. This might be extremely difficult but it is important to define “how we will act” and teach it to leaders so they can begin to instill it into the culture of the ministry.

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So, what environment do you think will best accomplish your mission? For my ministry this is what we use...

We will: Create a real environment where students can come, be themselves, and be honest about what is going on in their lives without the fear of judgement, or rejection. This is a place where they do not have to be fake.

Our mission is “To reach lost students for Christ and guide them into a REAL relationship with Him, themselves, and others.” In order to accomplish that we want to break down the stereotypes of church and create a place where students can come and feel welcome.

For me, and most of my friends growing up, church just felt like a fake place. I mean a place where you just couldn't be yourself, and if for some reason you were, you felt like you were being judged for all the bad things you did. I grew up in a church where everyone dressed up in suits on Sundays (I am not bashing people who wear suits to church, so long as its not just a church costume put on for Sundays and taken off afterwards and in so doing taking off God as well.) and looked all perfect and so I thought that I had to be perfect. Obviously, I was not, and am not, so therefore I felt like I had to fake it as if I was. I got so good at faking it that it became who I was at church. Once I became a student leader and had youth pastors that wouldn't have judged me I still didn't want to tell them who I really was for fear that they wouldn't see me as the “perfect” student. My youth pastors were amazing and are a big part of the reason I am in ministry today and honestly they wouldn't have judged me, but the church culture that I knew and the church environment that I had been raised in shaped how I acted. As I interact with students (and adults) I find that many of them feel the same way. For that reason we strive to create a REAL culture where students can be honest about how messed up they are, because we all are! In order to fulfill our mission we want to make sure every student feels as if they are welcome to come as they are and that the friends that they invite will also be welcomed to come as they are. If we have a student walk in to youth group flying high as a kite on drugs, our first response is not going to be “wow, we need to get this kid out of here!” It is going to be “Awesome! Praise God that this is where he is right now!”. In order to fulfill our mission that is the environment that we need to create.

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So what type of culture do you need to create to fulfill your mission? Write down your MISSION statement here...

Now, figure out what type of culture or environment you wish to create to help fulfill your mission. Jot down any words or phrases that you can think of...

(Examples: Safe, welcoming, no perfect people, nurturing, learning, quiet, crazy, fun, chill, etc.)

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Take all of those ideas and try and shove them into one or two quick comprehensive sentences that sum up how you want the environment to be. This should be a nice statement that you can give to volunteers, parents, or pastors to explain the feel of the group.

The vision is very important but it is not the main point. You need to make sure that your vision is coming along side and supporting your Mission. However, this vision statement is also a good measuring stick to you on how you are doing in your ministry. Once you have created it don't just refer to it when you are training a new volunteer, but bust it out and think to yourself “is this what we are doing?” “have we created this culture?” and then tweak what you need to in order to stay on course.

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How Do I Get There? Plan Of Attack

By now you have enough established with your mission and vision to be able to step back and look at your youth group and ask yourself “does what we do help to accomplish the mission and vision?” It is awesome to have a mission and vision but if you don't know how to accomplish it, then it is meaningless. When I first moved to college and wanted that carne asada burrito I could have searched the internet for taco shops, found the taco shop I wanted to go to, read the menu to know exactly what I would order, got in my car, and still not known how to get there. You have the first steps in knowing where you are going and what mode of transportation you are going to use but now you need to develop a plan on how to get there.

Just as I said with creating your mission and vision, this is going to look different for everyone based on the direction that God wants YOU to go. I will share with you the simple system that I use, and hope that it sparks your creativity in designing your own plan of attack. This simple system that I am about to share is very easily plugged into almost any group. The actual nuts and bolts (events and content) will look totally different in how you carry them out with your groups in your communities but the principles stay the same. (and if you do want to use it, feel free to use it all!)

What I use in order to fulfill my mission and vision is a simple system that was NOT created by me and has been around churches for awhile. It is known as...CONNECT...GROW...SERVE. Everything that we do within our ministry falls under one of these three areas. If you want to plan an event that doesn't fit into one of these three areas then don't plan it. You need to be very intentional about what you do or you run the risk of just doing things for the sake of doing things, which we established is also known as spinning your wheels without going anywhere. The good news is that almost everything will fit into one of these three areas.

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Let me break down what "connect, grow, serve" means and how our plan of attack works practically...

It is our goal that all students we connect to via outreach, evangelism, or relationships would reach a level of growth and maturity in their faith that they would plug back in through serving the Body of Christ and the community.

1. CONNECT

We want to connect to lost students. This is simply to fulfill our mission, which is to "Reach lost students for Christ..." and in order to reach them for Christ we need to connect to them. This can be accomplished through many avenues, one of which is throwing events for the sole purpose of connecting. What we do once a month is put on a "big event" that students can invite their lost friends to. This event is something that is awesome enough that students in the community want to go to. We HAVE FUN and preach the Gospel. Grow and Serve still take place at these events but the purpose is for connecting.

We don't just expect the students to come to us. We go to them. Find out where students are in your communities. Go to sporting events (as painful as a freshmen or JV game can be, it means the world to those students to see you there), coach a team, hangout at the taco shop or pizza parlor, take one or two of your youth group kids with you and hang out at the donut shop and meet their friends. Use what you are good at, and what God has blessed you with to connect to students.

These are not the only places that "connect" takes place because everything we do will have elements of connect, grow, and serve in them but these are usually the intentional things we do that are focused on "connect." However, it is our desire to see every student we connect to grow.

2. GROW

When it comes to fulfilling our MISSION, yes, we want to “Reach lost students” so we need to connect, but we also want to “guide them into a REAL relationship with Him” which means we need to make sure the students we connect to are GROWING.

I heard this analogy once. There are really two ways of populating, mammalian or reptilian. The reptilian method is to lay a whole bunch of eggs all over and let them hatch. A few survive and grow up and a lot end up dying due to different circumstances. The other way is mammalian. They have a few offspring and they care for them, nurture them, and raise them. I have seen both of these methods in church. Churches/Youth Ministries that connect to a lot of people and get them to accept Christ but once that happens they just let them go and hope they survive is the reptilian approach. On the other hand, Churches/Youth Ministries that connect to students (and it can still be a lot) and then care for them and teach them what it means to be a follower of Christ incorporate the mammalian tactic.

My understanding is that God has called us to make disciples and not just converts. This means that we need to see students GROW in our ministries. The things we do to focus on this area are; weekly teaching/preaching at youth group, and small groups or growth groups. We develop Biblical, applicable teaching that students can understand and apply to their lives and we give it to them every week at youth group. After the message we break up into small groups where students are able to ask questions and bounce around some of the ideas and concepts that were just taught. (Caution to leaders, if you are going to do this make sure that your volunteers are equipped so that you are not just throwing them to the wolves. Small groups can be pretty intimidating for a volunteer, especially if they are young or new)

Students also grow spiritually through the relationships that they have with their leaders. I tell my leaders and volunteers all the time that I went to church every Sunday and Wednesday growing up and I maybe remember 2 or 3 of the sermons that were given. But I do remember so many conversations and fun times that I had with Troy, Michael, Ken, Jon, and many other of my youth leaders. I have seen this in my own ministry many times. I had a student in small groups every week for a year and a half and some of the deepest questions that I got from him came when we were hanging out at the beach.

Again, these are not the only places that "GROW" happens but they are some of the places we focus on and are intentional about making grow a part of our ministry in order to fulfill the mission. We want every student we connect with to grow to a point where he understands the importance of "serve."

3. SERVE

Part of grasping a "REAL relationship with Him, themselves, and others" is understanding the importance of serving the Body of Christ. I don't think that it was ever God's intention to just have people come to church, sit down, get up, and leave. I think that He has given us gifts and abilities so that we can serve Him in our communities. Tragically so many people have this me, me, me mentality when it comes to church and I think that in some cases it begins with their experiences in youth ministry. That is why it is so important to teach our students the importance of serving. I have heard it said in churches before "saved people serve people".

In our plan of attack we accomplish the "SERVE" portion of our strategy by creating a student leadership team. We develop a core of students who are ready to learn what it means to be a leader. This means not just hear it, but do it. It is really my goal that our youth ministry be fully student led. Picture this, when you walk in you are greeted at the door by a member or two of the "welcome" team of students. Once you are inside you look to your left and see the snack bar being run by students. You then sit down and a student welcomes everyone from the stage and passes the mic to another student who runs the game and then turns it over to the student worship band that is actually led by students. The students are involved in planning youth groups, events, trips, message topics, etc. Now, obviously there are things that the adult leaders need to rein them in on and make executive decisions about but the student leaders that you have raised up are capable of doing amazing things. This not only gets the students involved and teaches them valuable lessons, it also frees up your adult leaders and yourself to mingle with students, build relationships, and deal with any issues that may come up.

When you are building a student leadership team don't be afraid to make it something that is a little difficult to be part of. Give them some requirements so that you get those students who are ready for it and are not just going to mess around the whole time. One of the things that we do is put them through an application process that includes get-

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ting a few letters of recommendation from teachers, friends, and adults. Make it something that they can work towards and take pride in.

One of the big things that I have seen in these students who learn the value of serving and are on a student leadership team where they can grow deeper in their faith is that when they graduate high school they don't graduate from their faith. This is one of the biggest issues that churches are facing today. The drop off rate from high school to the rest of the church is astounding, but I believe that if we can teach our students to have their own personal relationship with Christ that isn't dependent on how cool the youth pastor is, and we can teach them the importance of serving and being involved. It is then a natural progression for them to continue serving in the church when they graduate high school.

It is the goal within our ministry that every student we connect to eventually makes his way to serving, and not just serving in the youth but also within the community and within other parts of the church. We also make sure we are planning opportunities for this via outreach trips and serving events.

Connect, Grow Serve is just an example of a simple way that we put into practice a plan of attack to fulfill our mission. There are plenty of other ways that you can do it but I have found that following this model allows us to stay focused while still having the flexibility to make our ministry our own.

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How do I use it?

Get organized

If you are going to use the mission, vision, and plan of attack to its full potential it is important that you get organized with it. It is great that you have it all written down but if the napkin that it is written on just gets tossed on your desk and buried, then the plan loses its value and becomes the same as all those other stacks of paper on your desk. (Yes, I do know the stereotype youth workers get.) This plan can be an amazing tool to use in many different areas of your ministry. Organization and event planning, volunteer training, vision meetings, meetings with your senior pastor, and if you are in a church that does newsletters, (boom there you go) one of your months' articles.

Before you put it all down on one page, I want to stress to you again...MAKE IT FIT YOU! God has called you to youth ministry for a purpose. Find that purpose and follow it with all you're worth! Also, like I have said before, if the mission, vision and plan of attack that I have written fits you, then take it! Feel free to use all of it, some of it, or none of it. It is my prayer to see every single one of you succeed in your ministries, reach lost students, and teach them how to follow Him.

It is very important that you get all your ideas cohesive and on one, easy to read, usable page. This way you will be able to whip it out and hand it to anyone who wants to know more about the ministry. I have mine taped to the wall at eye level right behind my computer so that I see it all day, every day. Here is an example of my mission, vision, and plan of attack all on one easy to whip out page...

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Youth Ministry

What we are about

Our Mission is to...

To reach lost students for Christ and guide them into a REAL relationship with Him, themselves, and others.

In order to do this we will...

Create a real environment where students can be themselves and be honest about what is going on in their lives without fear of judgement, or rejection. This is a place where they do not have to be fake.

How we will accomplish this is...

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It is our goal that all students we connect to via outreach, evangelism, or relationships would reach a level of growth and maturity in their faith that they would plug back in through serving the Body of Christ and the community.

~Connect

-To fulfill our mission of reaching lost students means we need to be connecting to lost students. We will do things to draw them in, as well as going to where they are.

-Monthly outreach events, youth groups, holiday events, camps, etc.

~Grow

-Reaching students for Christ and guiding them into a real relationship with Him comes when students are able to grow and understand the Word of God. Our goal is that no student stays where they are spiritually, we all need to grow!

-Through weekly teaching, small groups, leader relationships, personal study, etc.

~Serve

-Our goal is that every student we connect to grows to a place where they can plug back in and serve the Body of Christ.

- Student leadership team, student worship band, mission trips, ministries in the church

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Do It!

Make that page the backbone of your ministry and go do awesome ministry! The ministry, youth groups, and events that you will do with this structure are completely up to you. Find out what works in your communities, fits your personality, and the personalities/interests of your students. I have a youth pastor friend who is what I like to call the “candle” youth pastor. He is always posting pictures of the youth space that he has created and it always involves lots of candles, low lights, and art. I am the polar opposite. I mean I will bust out the candles if I think it's necessary, but I am more of the flashing lights, yelling and high-energy guy. And guess what, neither of us is wrong, we are both reaching students, we live in different towns, and we have different personalities. Make your events fit your group and the group that you want to reach, but remember everything you do needs to be done with a purpose.

I hope that this system helps at least with gathering your thoughts and possibly taking away the helpless feeling that you may be experiencing. Youth ministry is hard and I don't think that there is a one size fits all approach to it. You may have already done all of this and still feel lost, but just remember God wouldn't have you there if He didn't have a plan for you! God wants to use you in incredible ways to reach students for Him!

Now create your own. Embrace it. Use it often. May the Lord bless your ministry!

About the Author



Todd Jones has a passion for reaching lost students and sharing the Word of God. He has been involved in student ministry since 2007 as first a volunteer, then an intern, and since 2011 a full time pastor. Todd is an ordained pastor who has a gift for communicating God's truth in a relevant, exciting, and personal way. He earned his degree in Christian studies from Cal Baptist University where he also played top level collegiate baseball. Todd is married to a beautiful wife named Rachael and they have 3 wonderful daughters. He also enjoys surfing, playing and watching most every sport, and building relationships. Todd's prayer is that the Lord will allow him to reach as many lost students as he can and equip as many youth workers to do the same.

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