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Putting Youth Ministry into Perspective

Richard R. Dunn

Steve surveys his new surroundings: an ancient metal desk, a recently installed phone, an older but functional computer, two worn metal folding chairs, and a file cabinet. "Pastor Steve's office," he whispers aloud, breaking into an approving smile.

Steve is the first youth pastor of Easton Community Church, a multicultural urban church plant that has grown from four families to a congregation of 225 in just five years. Steve muses that his childhood friends could never have imagined that he, the firstborn son of a dairy farming family in the Midwest, would be found living in an urban setting; Steve, in fact, is as surprised as anyone.

Recollections of his friends lead to fond memories of Brian and Joyce, the lay youth leaders in Steve's small rural church. The young married couple were used by God in significant ways to nurture his sincere though sometimes uncertain faith.

Reproducing the loving, open relational context Brian and Joyce created through their leadership is a central component of Steve's vision for Easton. Yet Steve is acutely aware that he cannot simply duplicate in a multicultural urban context the same youth ministry programs and methods he experienced in his monocultural rural youth group.

In the candidating process Steve had felt quite confident of his readiness for youth ministry. Now, on the occasion of his first day as a youth pastor, several questions are beginning to threaten that self-assurance. These questions include: How can I ever meet the needs of students from such diverse social and cultural backgrounds? How can I build maturity in the lives of the twenty junior high and fifteen high school students who attend youth Sunday school? How can I build bridges to the other five thousand students who attend schools within five miles of the church? What changes should I be making right away?

"8:47 A.M." Steve's watch informs him that he has now been a youth pastor for seventeen minutes. "This may not be as easy as I thought," he concludes.

THINKING YOUTH MINISTRY: STEVE'S CHALLENGE

Everyone in youth ministry, from college students volunteering in a campus ministry to the twenty-year veteran in a local church, has a particular youth ministry perspective. Based upon past church, ministry, educational, and personal spiritual experiences, every leader has a preconceived set of ideas about what is important in terms of values and practices in youth ministry.

Steve is realizing that he has his own youth ministry perspective. He has identified the significant influence of Brian and Joyce in shaping how he understands youth ministry. Other learning experiences that have made an impact on his ministry perspective include youth ministry training seminars and the camping ministry internship he participated in last summer.

None of Steve's past experiences, however, can act as a blueprint for the development of his new ministry at Easton. What he has previously learned cannot sufficiently provide

answers for all of the new questions he is facing. Steve's challenge is both to broaden and to sharpen his current youth ministry perspective. He has been an effective "doer" of youth ministry; now he is discovering his need to become a more effective "thinker" of youth ministry.

TOWARD A MATURE MINISTRY MIND-SET: FOCUSING MINISTRY LENSES

To suggest that anyone's ministry perspective has perfect 20/20 vision would be naive. Sin, human limitations, and the diversity of human experiences guarantee that no one sees with absolute clarity. Steve, however, does not need to despair as he faces his limitations. In fact, Steve should be encouraged because there exists an ever-present potential for bringing his ministry perspective's vision into clearer focus. Robert Clinton suggests that such refocusing is an essential component for anyone called to long-term ministry:

> Effective leaders, at all levels of leadership, maintain a learning posture throughout life. . . . Leaders must develop a ministry philosophy that simultaneously honors biblical leadership values, embraces the challenges of the times in which we live, and fits their unique gifts and personal development if they expect to be productive over a lifetime. (Clinton 1988, 180)

Implicit in Clinton's statement is a challenge to Steve and all youth ministry leaders *to take responsibility for focusing the internal interpretive lenses that shape youth ministry perspectives.* Too often the urgency of an endless succession of ministry demands crowds out reflecting upon and disciplining one's ministry lenses. John Detonni observes that youth ministry leaders often become consumed by these urgent tasks:

> Most often youth workers—and especially youth pastors—are very pragmatic and oriented to the program: fun and games, Bible studies, camps, retreats, social activities, and such things. It is a little difficult to talk about philosophy and theology with such youth workers in the morning when they know they are taking care of fifteen junior highers that same evening. Further, youth workers have a reputation not of being "thinkers" but doers, being more interested in how to

do youth ministry than in the reasons and basis of it. (Detonni 1993, 17)

Because everyone is—consciously or unconsciously—operating out of a personal ministry perspective, it is unfortunate that so little attention is paid to such a critical component of youth ministry.

Acknowledging one's ministry perspective is one thing. Taking responsibility for evaluating and rethinking one's preconceived ideas is a separate, qualitatively different task. Clinton would suggest that this is necessary, Detonni that it is rare. What route can Steve take in his journey toward this crucial task?

A MODEL FOR FOCUSING
STEVE'S MINISTRY PERSPECTIVE

A starting place for Steve's exploration and development of his ministry perspective is presented in graphic form in Figure 1.1. The model assumes that this process is best moved along by examining three internal interpretive grids: the theological framework, the developmental framework, and the sociocultural framework. The model also demonstrates the significance of a historical framework for youth ministry. History provides insight into the dynamic nature of youth ministry perspectives. Further exploration of history's contribution is found in chapter 5, "A Historical Framework for Doing Youth Ministry," by Mark Senter.

The theological framework provides the primary base for developing one's ministry perspective. Steve's first goal is to discipline his theological thinking so that he has an increasingly accurate understanding of who God is and what it means to serve as a minister of the gospel. Human development assumptions narrow Steve's ministry vision into a more focused understanding of what it means to serve as a minister of the gospel to youth. Steve's goal here is to comprehend more of what it means to be an adolescent so that his ministry is increasingly appropriate to the developmental stages of the students. The final grid, the sociocultural framework, brings into an even more specific focus the ways in which Steve should be doing ministry in his new church. Sociocultural in-

terpretations suggest what it means to serve as a minister of the gospel to youth in a particular context. Steve's goal is grasp the uniqueness of this particular context so that he may be increasingly adaptive to the needs and perceptions of his students.

Figure 1.1 provides a picture of how these lenses work together in a dynamic dialogue with one another. Thinking through these grids from presuppositions to practice will shape the way Steve does ministry in his new context. Thinking through these grids from practice to presuppositions will inform Steve's understanding within each grid. If Steve is to think Christianly, critically, and creatively in the unchartered, unfamiliar ministry territory he has entered he must give attention to the spiraling dialogue between each component of the model.

Theological Framework: A "God-View"

The theological framework lens could be described as Steve's understanding of "the way God sees." Based upon biblical knowledge and theological reasoning each person has a perception of who God is and how He views the created world, including people and relationships. The theological lens is the core of the leader's belief system. This lens is not limited to the leader's explicit doctrinal statements, however. Every leader, including Steve, has internalized theological beliefs that shape how he "reads and reacts" in a given context.

The significance of a fully developed, consciously reflective theological presuppositions lens can be described in these ways:

1. It provides the basic rationale for youth ministry.

Youth ministers lament the poor understanding others have of their role in the church or on the campus. Expectations to "baby-sit" or "entertain" the youth are as frustrating as the subtle messages which imply that youth ministry is not a "real job." The youth ministry leader's polemic is primarily a theological one. Youth ministry is a component of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) and the body of Christ's "ministry of reconciliation" (see 2 Corinthians 5:20–21). The vision for youth ministry should be driven by obedience to

PRESUPPOSITIONS

THEOLOGICAL

H I S T O R I C A L   DEVELOPMENTAL   H I S T O R I C A L

SHAPING
INFORMING

SOCIO-
CULTURAL

PRACTICES
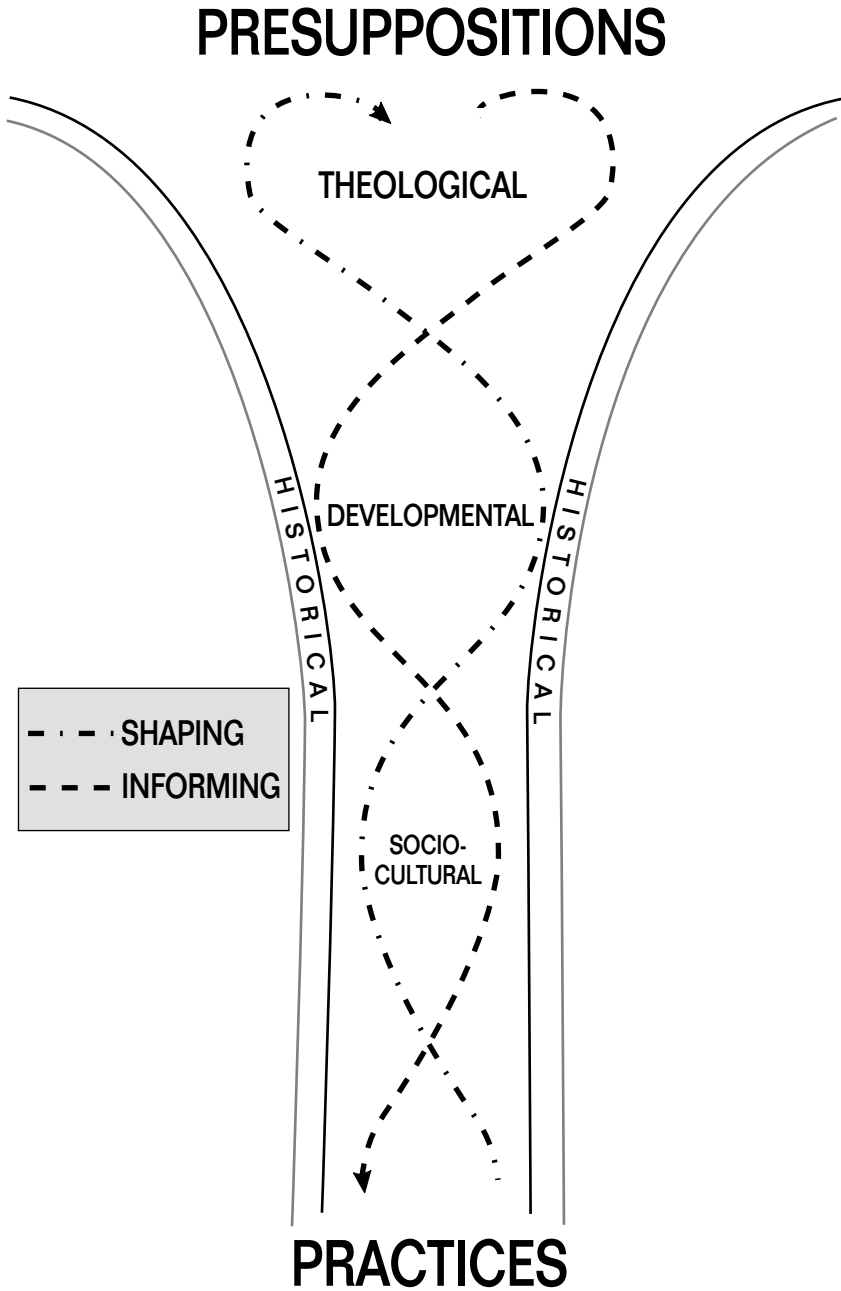
Figure 1.1. *A Model of Youth Ministry*

God' s commands to the church, not by the need to "take care of the kids."

A mature, well-articulated rationale challenges others' myopic visions of youth ministry. Rather than asking evaluative questions such as "Are the high school students active in the church?" or "Do the junior high students' parents like the youth program of the church?" the theological lens calls into question the bigger picture of what is happening in the student's spiritual lives.

2. It guides the ministry Godward.

First Peter 4:10–11 reveals the heart of the focus of ministry leadership:

> Each of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

It is too easy to begin to focus ministry on one's own agenda. Increasing numbers, gaining prestige in the community or denomination, and fueling one's self-esteem can usurp the agenda of the youth ministry program. The theological lens calls leaders back to "first things."

3. It guides the ministry into the faith community.

Growth in Christian maturity is not meant to be pursued in isolation from significant relationships with other members of Christ's body (Ephesians 4:11–16). A mature theological framework considers the implications of God's design of the local church as a place where children and youth participate in an intentional, intergenerational faith community.

Guiding the ministry into the faith community is critical. Students' spiritual growth is stunted if they are lacking in spiritual relationships with peers *and* adults. Peers may have the most immediate impact on the life of an adolescent. Parents and adult mentors, however, have the most important

long-term effect on students' lives. By God's design, students need to belong to and participate in the life of the local church.

4. *It critiques ministry practices.*

Scripture does not provide a how-to guide for youth ministers. Although some would suggest that "the biblical way" to do youth ministry exists, the reality is that there are many ways to do youth ministry that are consistent with biblical values, commands, and principles. At the same time, not all that passes for youth ministry is necessarily biblical.

A mature theological view of ministry understands that there is a difference between an idea that has biblical foundations and practicing that idea in a biblical manner. For instance, one might hold to the belief that it is a biblical practice to develop and equip student leaders for ministry. However, if in the implementation of that strategy the youth leader exhibits favoritism and partiality to these students, then the "biblical" strategy becomes an "unbiblical" practice. Being biblical, therefore, requires a continual evaluation of the *why, what,* and *how* of youth ministry.

5. *It determines the content and shapes the delivery of the teaching.*

Theological presuppositions will ultimately drive the teaching component of a ministry. A commitment to teach Scripture in a way that honors its unique role as specific revelation will honor God's intent that the Word is to be taught for response and life-change. Teaching for knowledge of the Bible will be foundational, but that teaching is incomplete unless one also guides the learners toward a thoughtful and loving obedience to God. Delivery, a part of the "hidden curriculum" of teaching, must also be critiqued for the implicit messages being communicated about what it means to know and love God.

6. *It provides ministry motivation and challenge for service.*

Nothing could read more like a youth ministry leader's heart than Paul's self-description of his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to

share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

Like Paul, youth ministry leaders are aware of the substantial personal investment required for meaningful life change. In youth ministry, terms such as *relational youth ministry* and *incarnational ministry* are often used to describe that personal impartation of one's life.

Imparting one's life, however, is no easy task. After his first six months in ministry, a graduate called one day to give me a report of his experiences. His words were telling: "You told us that ministry was hard, but I never really believed you. Now I know what you meant; in fact, it is harder than you said it would be."

Ministry is more work than fun, more sacrifice than recreation. How does one stay motivated to deal with the disappointments, failures, and criticisms that are inevitably a part of the ministry experience? Paul found his motivation for enduring in the sacrificial life of Christ:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5–8)

Leaders need a theology that has begun to develop a mature concept of the serving nature of ministry. Part of the reason youth ministry leaders have such short tenures in churches and on campuses is that they have failed to develop the theological maturity needed to weather the inevitable hurts that occur in ministry leadership.

Steve's ministry perspective can begin to be theologically focused. His first step must include identifying and evaluating his current theological presuppositions. Steve can discover the essential foundations for this step in chapter 2, "A Theological Framework for Doing Youth Ministry." Those foundations will provide the context for Steve to ask these *shaping* and *informing* questions:

- *What are my core theological beliefs?*
  For example, what do I believe about God, sin, salvation, and Scripture?

- *How do my beliefs presently shape my ministry practices?*
  For example, how does God's sovereignty affect the way I do ministry among the students?

- *Are there any points at which I need to make adjustments so that my practices in ministry are reshaped in a manner more consistent with what I believe to be theologically true? Do any of my practices contradict my beliefs?*
  For example, am I emphasizing God's grace and holiness in my teaching, yet failing to confront students appropriately when I recognize sinful attitudes and behaviors?

- *How are my experiences in ministry informing my theological framework? What theological issues do I need to explore more thoroughly or revisit for clarification?*
  For example, how do I present God as Father to a student whose father is physically and/or emotionally absent from the home? In fact, how do I understand the concept of God as Father in my own life?

Developmental Framework: A "Youth-View"

A developmental framework is Steve's understanding of the way the world is experienced in the life stage of adolescence: "the way youth see." "How do students experience and make sense of their world?" is the central question to be answered. The framework, therefore, takes seriously the role the adolescent developmental process plays in a student's personal and spiritual formation.

A developmental framework lens is an area where leaders too often develop ministry "brain cramps." Developmental mistakes are among the easiest leadership errors to make. All persons tend to see the world from their own perspective. When my daughter Jessica was only four years old I discovered that

she was tall enough to ride several of the roller coasters at the Six Flags theme park near our home. My enthusiasm for roller coasters and her lack of fear of heights convinced me that she too would love them. First we tried out the Whizzer, a small but quick roller coaster. Her analysis at the end was, "I would take my children on that."

We were, in my estimation, ready for the big time. I led my daughter to the far end of the park where the great white roller coaster, the American Eagle, sat waiting to drop us down a one hundred-foot hill at fifty-five miles per hour. As we embarked, Jessica was content with looking out at the scenery. I, too, was enjoying sharing the ride with her—until we reached the top. It was at that point I realized we might have a problem. As soon as we were catapulted down the hill I knew I had experienced the equivalent of a brain cramp.

As we hurtled forward, I turned to see the look of terror on my little girl's face. As soon as we went up the next hill, she said, "Is it over?" "Well, sort of, honey. There's a little bit left," I responded, as we were launched into a next series of breathtaking, teeth-jarring hills. I felt guilty the whole agonizing three minutes (it felt like three hours) of the ride—not to mention the anxiety that overwhelmed me when I realized Jessica would definitely want to tell Mom about Dad's great idea!

Developmental mistakes in ministry can cause more damage than is caused by taking one's child on an American Eagle terror ride. I can recall a junior high retreat where I encouraged students to make a commitment to pray for thirty minutes a day when they returned home. In a desire to please God and their youth pastor, they made the commitment. I felt very satisfied about the results until about Wednesday of the week after the retreat. As I began to reflect on how much difficulty I was having in keeping that commitment, I repented for what I had done to those students in my sincere, but misguided, zeal. I had set the students up for failure in their attempts to develop a spiritual discipline. What seemed to be a good idea was actually a bad one. My ministry brain cramp led to discouragement, not discipline for my eager junior high students.

A developmental framework for youth ministry is important in several ways.

1. It overcomes inaccurate stereotypes.

Stereotypes are often made concerning adolescents as a whole, as well as in reference to individuals. Adults tend to treat adolescents as either "big kids" or "little adults." They are neither. Yet they are both. Adults must work to respect and honor the unique challenges and opportunities of this age "between the times."

Furthermore, individual students are easily misunderstood. I remember Henry, a ninth grader who bench-pressed more than most of the seniors on his high school football team. Adults who looked at Henry's six-foot-plus frame tended to project onto him a maturity beyond that of a fourteen-year-old. In fact, Henry possessed an emotional maturity that was *less* than a fourteen-year-old. Henry required patience in understanding that he was not what he appeared to be.

2. It informs theological understanding of spiritual maturity.

Adults must be careful not to mistake characteristics of adolescent development for sin. For example, selflessness is considered by Jesus as an important spiritual quality. Students in the youth group can display selflessness on missions trips or in a giving of their time which surpasses that of any adult in the church. Those same students can also make choices that reveal a decidedly egocentric orientation. Why? In some cases, these choices may truly be expressions of sinful, selfish attitudes. In other cases, they may simply reflect developmental immaturity.

Whatever the root of the behavior (maybe it is a combination of sin *and* immaturity), the attitude must be confronted appropriately, displaying sensitivity to what is taking place in the adolescents' maturation process. Too often youth are alienated from the spiritual lives of adults because of misunderstandings and, consequently, impatience on the part of adults.

3. It provides tangible "touch points" for intangible spiritual ministry.

A leader cannot physically touch the student spiritually. Yet every conversation, pat on the back, and nonverbal response makes an impact on the spiritual life of the student. How does one know how to "touch" students in spiritually meaningful ways? The answer lies in coming to a holistic understanding of how an adolescent experiences, interprets, and responds to her world. An informed developmental perspective helps to discriminate among the plethora of teaching, relationship building, and programming possibilities that exist in a given context. As a consequence, the leader is better able to prepare more purposefully for ministry students at their points of need and growth.

4. It shapes the discernment of outcomes and process of assessment.

Too often the church leadership stamps its approval on student ministries if students do not "smoke, drink, chew, or run with those who do"; if they are respectful and behave appropriately in church; and if they remain active in the youth group. However, a mature understanding of human development indicates that the goal is not to "get them through high school." Rather, the goal is to prepare them for adulthood.

Steve's ministry perspective can begin to be developmentally focused. Steve can increase the clarity of his understanding of adolescent developmental issues by reading chapter 3, "A Developmental Framework for Doing Youth Ministry." He will then be prepared to address the same pattern of critical *shaping* and *informing* questions he faced in his critique of his theological presuppositions:

- *What are the core components of my understanding of the developmental stages of the adolescents to whom I minister?*
  For example, what are they experiencing intellectually and emotionally at this stage of life?

• *How do the developmental stages of adolescence shape the way I do youth ministry?*
For example, how has an understanding of the differences between early and late adolescents guided my strategies for using and training my adult sponsors for ministry to the students in their various stages of mental, emotional, and social maturity?

• *Are there any points at which I need to reshape my ministry practices in light of what I am coming to understand about the students' personal and spiritual development?*
For example, does my teaching on obedience to God include ways for late adolescents to deal with the inconsistencies they discover in their own lives?

• *How are my experiences in ministry informing my developmental framework? What developmental issues do I need to explore more thoroughly or revisit for clarification?*
For example, high school upperclassmen seem to move away from the church no matter what programs are in place. How does this reframe my questions about later adolescent developmental processes? What clues for solving this dilemma can be found in the literature on adolescent development?

• *How do the issues raised in my exploration of the developmental framework inform my theological framework? What theological issues do I need to explore more thoroughly or revisit for clarification?*
For example, if late adolescents go through a period of struggling with "owning" their faith, how do I integrate this concept with what God reveals about spiritual growth in Scripture? What does this integration suggest I should be doing to prepare seniors for graduation and young adulthood?

Sociocultural Framework: An "Inside-View"

Whereas the developmental framework examines how the

adolescent life-stage contributes to a teenager's view of the world, the sociocultural framework addresses how their environment shapes that perspective into a worldview. The sociocultural framework is formed by the youth leader's understanding of (a) the students' views of social roles, networks, groups, and interpersonal affiliations and (b) the students' relationship to cultural symbols, myths, rituals, belief systems, and worldviews.

Social settings such as families and immediate peer groups have a profound influence upon the self-image and worldview of a student. A dysfunctional family system or a prolonged sense of rejection by friends at school can lead to patterns of self-protection and feelings of inadequacy in interpersonal relationships. Cultural values as demonstrated or communicated through the media, school system, or family lifestyle and practices likewise make a significant, though at times more subtle, impact on a student's overall orientation to life. For instance, the consumerism and materialism of the American culture can be internalized unknowingly by students. Given prolonged exposure to advertisers' seductive marketing strategies and/or parents who always feel the need to "keep up with the Joneses" (who, by the way, are trying to keep up with the Smiths), students assimilate the values that permeate their world.

In light of the power of social and cultural environments, John Detonni exhorts all youth leaders to be ethnographers. He defines ethnography as "the intentional study of a culture or subculture by someone from outside that culture or subculture" (Detonni 1993, 55). A youth worker, as a participant-observer who is among the students yet not truly one of them, performs the following tasks in response to the youth culture:

> [He] *describes* the culture/subculture, stating what it is; *analyzes* it, showing how it works; *interprets* it, stating its meaning *to* the culture's members; *predicts* it, telling what will happen, and is able to live harmoniously within that culture. (Detonni 1993, 55)

As ethnographers, youth workers must try to make sense out of youth culture. They must try to develop an insider's

point of view of what it means to be saturated with this environment. The purpose of this cultural examination is twofold: to assist adults in building relational bridges to students and to assist adults in guiding students in their process of "making meaning" of their Christian faith in the midst of their world.

The sociocultural framework is significant for these reasons:

1. It bridges generational assumptions.

Baby boomers. Baby busters. Generation X. The Millennial Generation. The practice of naming generations is an attempt to identify common values, beliefs, and worldviews among a group of people born in a particular historical era. Though such identifications are broad generalizations, they speak to the differences that emerge, depending on the economic, political, religious, and moral climates within which people are nurtured. Because these differences are real, adult members of one generation must work to avoid misunderstanding the adolescent members of the next.

2. It bridges cultural assumptions.

Diversity is emerging as the rule rather than the exception in North American culture. Rural and urban, African-American and Asian-American, Hispanic and Arabic, the world in which students are growing up is full of a variety of shades of skin, first languages, and religious affiliations. The contextualization of the gospel and the development of relevant ministry strategies often require seeing the world from another cultural point of view.

3. It informs a holistic understanding of an individual's personal and spiritual development.

Although the theological framework provides the doctrines for identifying true spirituality and the developmental framework suggests how students grow spiritually as they develop personally, the sociocultural lens describes the students' relationships, which will either support or work against spiritual maturity. Every student in a youth ministry context brings with her a past of parental and peer relationships, as well as a present set of such significant relationships.

These are the "forces" that will have much to do with how she grows spiritually. Understanding these relational contexts prevents leaders from presenting one-size-fits-all approaches to spiritual growth.

4. It provides a framework for exegeting behavior.

"I just don't understand these kids." Even the most seasoned youth leader at times is at a loss to explain the "why" of students' behavior—both positive and negative. Why students like a certain musical style, dress the way they do, choose the persons they date, and spend their money the way they do can often be explained by their sociocultural contexts.

5. It critiques the relevance of practices for a moment in time.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it" would be a poor motto for youth ministry leadership. The rapidity of social change, the diversity of contemporary culture, and the complexity of students' lives suggest that what worked before may not be the most effective approach now. City-wide rallies, process small groups, and door-to-door evangelism are among the ministry options that may be effective in one setting but not in another. The effectiveness of a strategy will largely be determined by sociocultural factors.

6. It identifies, in concert with the developmental lens, tangible "touch points" for incarnational ministry among youth.

One only has to look at Jesus' ministry with the woman at the well in John 4 and Paul's ministry in Athens in Acts 17 to discover how important understanding relational and cultural contexts can be in ministry. Knowing that Jill's parents are divorced, that Joey feels like a "loser" in his high school, that all of Mark's friends are into heavy metal music, and that Marcia's family struggles to pay their bills every month all matter when one considers how best to enable these students to understand and experience God in their daily lives.

Steve's ministry perspective can begin to be socioculturally focused. Steve will find a model for social analysis of a youth ministry context in chapter 4, "A Sociological Framework for

Doing Youth Ministry." Steve will then be prepared to address the same pattern of critical *shaping* and *informing* questions that he faced in his evaluation of his theological and developmental lenses:

- *What are the key characteristics of the students' sociocultural environments?*
  For example, what are their families like in composition and in terms of values?

- *How does the sociocultural context of my students shape the way I do youth ministry?*
  For example, how do the family backgrounds of my students inform the way I am developing this ministry?

- *Are there any points at which I need to make adjustments in my ministry practices in light of what I am coming to understand about the students' relational and cultural contexts?*
  For example, if students lack meaningful relational contact with adults, what new strategies should I be exploring?

- *How are my experiences in ministry informing my sociocultural framework? What sociocultural issues do I need to explore more thoroughly or revisit for clarification?*
  For example, if my students seem to be uninterested in corporate worship, are there sociocultural-issues clues that would guide me as I engage them and motivate them to participate in church worship?

- *How do the issues raised in my exploration of the sociocultural framework inform my theological or developmental frameworks? What theological or developmental issues do I need to explore more thoroughly or revisit for clarification?*
  For example, how do I understand true worship for these students in light of their approach to God in their music, their relational styles, and their concept of spirituality? What theological and developmental questions emerge

from their culturally relevant forms of worship? How can answers to these questions be useful in guiding their worship ever more Godward, while also enabling them to make worship their own?

TOWARD A MATURE MINISTRY PERSPECTIVE

Developing one's ministry perspective is a long-term process of focusing theological, developmental, and sociocultural lenses (see Getz 1988 for a similar development). For Steve, a new context has served as a catalyst for intentionally broadening and sharpening his particular understanding of the nature and practice of youth ministry. Ultimately, it will be his daily commitment to listen to students, to seek wisdom in God's Word, to pray with and for the students, to reflect upon successes and failures, and to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit that will help him form an increasingly mature ministry perspective.

Steve came to Easton to make a difference by ministering the gospel to students in the community. Little did he know that the ministry of the gospel in that community would make such a difference in him.

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