

Changing the World

Creative Christian Ideas
for Youth Groups

Ken Moser

youth*surge*
PRESS

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Preface

Welcome to Creative Christian Ideas for Youth Groups. This is the brand new, updated version full of ideas designed to make your life easier and your ministry even more effective!

This book is designed to be a resource to help you run weekly youth gatherings that are clearly Christian, promote good relationships, and are enjoyable at the same time! Over the next few pages we will focus on the weekly youth gathering (some call it the meeting or fellowship). We will give you some helpful tips, hints and lots of program segments designed to be solid in content and helpful to the group.

Please note that all the ideas in this book have been tried and tested by groups in different contexts in many parts of the world. There are many youth leaders who have gone before you and embarked on the road that you are now on. Welcome!

I am very keen to help groups change the world by helping youth leaders run youth meetings that glorify God, build strong disciples of Jesus, promote group unity, help Christian young people reach out to their friends, and are fun at the same time!

What this book aims to help you to do

With God's help, this book will help you to develop weekly youth gatherings that promote three things:

1. Good solid Christian content
2. Loving Christian relationships within the group
3. Enjoyment in gathering with other Christians

Read on!

Ken Moser

Please visit me! www.kenmoser.com

If you'd like to make contact or share ideas please contact me at kjmoser@hotmail.com

Also by Ken Moser

No Guts No Glory (co-author)

Changing the World Through Effective Youth Ministry

Youth Evangelism; reaching young people in a way that honours God

Programs 2 Go: 18 programs for the youth leader on the go.

(These are available at www.youthsurge.com.au)

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To the many people who helped form the ideas in the following pages. Where possible, I have tried to give due credit. Thanks to those who sent in the many new ideas that are in this new edition.

To Gary and Carol O'Brien, thanks for being deeply committed friends. Eddie, you've always been a big support- hang in there big fella!

Finally, thanks to the team from Stuntmasters and the International Rebiblication Association. You have inspired countless generations of young people across the world to take the Bible seriously and to bring their Bibles to youth groups.

This book is dedicated to all those youth leaders and groups trying to build with gold, silver and costly stones. Press on brothers! Press on sisters!

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I N T R O D U C T I O N



Long ago in a suburb far away

Once upon a time there was a young man training at a Bible college. He loved Jesus and was eager to change the world for him.

After a year at college, one of his professors suggested that he should get a part-time job working for a church. 'This is part of your education and will help sharpen your ministry skills,' he said. The young man quickly found a church that was desperate for a youth leader and it seemed like a nice fit. 'Perfect,' he thought.

Now this young man didn't really have much of an idea as to how to run a Christian youth group. However, he knew what he wanted to achieve. He was eager to see a thriving group made up of young men and women wanting to follow Jesus. He wanted a group that would love each other and would reach out to those who weren't Christians. He wanted a group that would have some impact on the local community. So he found some 'experts' and asked their advice. He spent time with several people who had gone before him and were experienced in running Christian youth groups. They were very helpful. They told him

to run a group on a Friday night with an hour or so of games and activities and then try to have a Bible study, prayer and small groups. 'That sounds great!' he said. The experts also told him to go to the local Christian bookstore. 'There'll be plenty of helpful books on how to run a youth program,' they said. They were right. He found dozens of books on games and activities designed to produce an evening of way out, crazy, full on, wild fun.

He took over the reins of the youth group and it was a raging success. He was a natural at running games that were exciting and he could tell a funny story which delighted the kids. He also learned how to run a tight program. He had an hour of fun and games, a short talk and then discussion groups followed by a bite to eat and another game. For two years the group grew and grew. He started with eight kids and when he left, there were nearly 30 young people who were devoted to the Friday night fellowship.

At the end of two years, it was time to move on. He took a job in another part of town to gain some different ministry experience. He felt sad, yet he knew that the program would continue. 'The kids will be okay,' he assured himself.

Soon after he left however, there were problems. The new leader didn't have an American accent and the games weren't as much fun. Many left. The group numbers dropped from 30 to half a dozen or so.

He always felt sad when he thought about the group. 'Why didn't they stay with the Christian faith,' he would ask himself, 'when they had such a good time each Friday night?'

That's not the end of the story. Fifteen years later the members held a reunion. Many of the young people, who now were not so young, came along. Even the old leader showed up. It was a fun time. Yet, the old leader was deeply troubled. Most of the people now showed no desire to follow Jesus. They couldn't be bothered. While it was great to see all the old gang again, his heart was heavy for many weeks.

C H A P T E R 1



First things first!

Don't you feel sorry for the poor guy in the previous story? He had devoted two years of his life to building up a youth group yet he saw little or no fruit. While there was a great boost in numbers, he saw very few kids turn to Christ and follow him long-term. Ultimately, there was nowhere near the impact for the Kingdom of God that he had hoped.

Yet, take heart, he learned his lesson and won't make the same mistake again! The lesson for us all is that what we do in our weekly youth meetings is of the utmost importance. We must be clear about what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to do it.

I am going to assume that your aim in youth ministry is to produce disciples of Christ – disciples who will last the distance. These young men and women will be the backbone of a youth ministry that will be truly effective in changing this world for Jesus. I am also going to assume that you intend to run weekly youth group meetings designed to achieve that goal

Make sure you 'build'

The idea is simple – concentrate primarily on running a group that is committed to being Christian. As the group prays, enjoys true fellowship and reads the Bible together, it will encourage its members to live lives that reflect Jesus to the outside world. Your hope and prayer is to build strong disciples who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and love their neighbors as well.

Use what you build to 'reach'

You do not just want to be a group that only cares about itself. Your goal is to produce strong Christian young people who will show Jesus to world around them. They will do this naturally as they live godly lives. Hopefully they will also be equipped to take every opportunity to talk with their friends and family about Jesus. In addition to this, the youth group will run targeted evangelistic events designed to clearly present Christ to the outsider.

Make sure that the groups 'flow'

Your goal is to keep the young people you have by running groups that are age appropriate. As the kids grow up, move them into a group designed for that stage of their lives. The obvious example of this is having a junior youth group ready to take the kids who are moving up from Sunday school. You need to plug the gaps that can cause you to lose kids.

This book is designed to help you to program for effective building and equipping the young people in your group to live godly lives. As you read you will find ideas that will be Christian, helpful for building good relationships within the group, and a lot of fun.

Before we launch into some programming ideas, we need to spend a minute and identify some pitfalls that await the unwary youth leader.

Traps for youth leaders

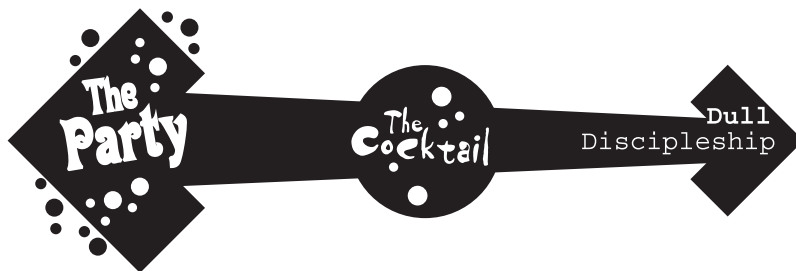
If you wish to set up and run a weekly youth program that will produce real long-term results, there are a number of traps to avoid. Let's examine a few common mistakes youth leaders often make.

Big Mistake #1: The False Spectrum

Many of us see youth ministry as a wide spectrum. At one end is the 'Party.' The Party is a program of entertainment and attractions. It is designed to be fun, fun, fun. It contains a high proportion of games and activities designed to be fun with little or no meaningful

content. A typical evening might be an hour or so of games and activities, a short talk (maybe some discussion groups) and then another game or two. The aim is to have a variety of activities and entertainment, with a small amount of Christian input. The hope is to keep the Christian kids 'off the street' and to attract some non-Christians. This style of program is very common, very tiring and in most cases, unworkable.

At the other end of the spectrum is 'Dull Discipleship'. This is where the youth meetings are built around Bible study and prayer. The hope is to cut through the obvious shallowness of the Party and produce real followers of Jesus. However, the whole thing is too heavy. Well, boring is more the word. The group doesn't attract any newcomers and the regulars soon find it quite dreary. Sure, some kids are being strengthened in the faith, but there must be a way of producing disciples without putting the rest of the group to sleep!



The majority of us run a program somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. I call this 'the cocktail' or the 'each way bet'. This is where we try to run a program containing the good elements of the activities-based Party program. We hope the group will be fun and exciting with new people coming every week. Yet, we also want a group with real devotion to Christ that is found in the full-on Bible study program. Therefore, we run 45 minutes to an hour of games and fast-paced activities, then have a short Bible talk and/or discussion groups, and finally have a bite to eat before everyone piles into the leaders' cars for a lift home. While this program appears to be a workable solution, there are a number of problems. Many of us have tried to reign in a hyped up group after an hour of games. Our goal is to move on to discussion groups but the kids want to keep smacking each other with the rolled up newspapers. The Cocktail also sends out the signal that we don't know how to have fun and do Christian activities.

There is a common flaw in each of these models. We try to make our programs fun and often the fun is not Christian. We then have a Christian segment, which isn't fun. We believe it is an either/or situation. The program can be entertaining and attractive (the fun), or there is the Christian time (the truth). There is a false split in our programs between having fun and doing the Christian things we feel we must do. We need to throw this whole idea of youth ministry out the window and get rid of any idea that a Christian youth gathering cannot be both Christian and fun. We must aim at finding our enjoyment in doing Christian things (like meeting together, encouraging each other, prayer, and studying the Bible).



Big Mistake #2: Building with straw

In Australia there is a plant called the choko. The interesting thing about the choko is they have no flavor of their own; they are used to fill up whatever is missing in certain food dishes. For example, if you are making pie and you don't have enough apples, grab a choko and throw it in. Presto! It takes on the flavor of the apples already there, and you have a full pie.

While the choko is a great food additive, it is not as good as the real fruit. It is, after all, only an additive. You never make a 'choko pie'. Nor would you put a choko in when you have something much better (like real apples). When it comes to youth ministry, we must be careful that we don't fill our programs with choko! The temptation for many youth leaders is to fill the program with contents that serve no real purpose. Quite often, these things actually work against us rather than for us.

In the book of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul warns us that we must be careful how we build in our ministry. I'll remind you of his words.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

The message is clear, build with good materials (gold, silver and costly stones). Avoid building with anything that will not stand on the Day of Judgment. With this in view, we must be careful that we don't fill our programs with straw (or choko)! Our weekly meetings or fellowship nights must not contain items that only fill in time, or burn up some energy. If this is the case, either change your program or shorten the length of your

meeting. Certain games or high-energy activities often fall into this trap. We justify them by claiming that they promote getting to know each other, good mixing or team building. In reality, they are usually nothing more than straw. They serve no purpose other than filling in time. Many of us shrug our shoulders and say, 'How else are we going to provide young people with a good time and fill up two hours at the same time?'

Quite often we don't know how to run 'Christian' programming that is truly fun and attractive. We sweat through giving a short talk from the Bible, sometimes bribing the kids along the way, 'If you sit still and listen for five minutes then we'll play another game.' We try to have a group prayer time but often end up taking silly requests and when it's time to pray all we hear is an eerie silence or the occasional giggle. Many of us would never dare to sing or have a time of praise and worship. You'd be better off trying to control a herd of wildebeests barehanded. Some leaders find that their groups pray and study the Bible because it is important, but it certainly isn't the highlight of the evening. We must learn how to correct this.

Big Mistake # 3: No committed core or community

Some of us have groups that seem to be on a shifting base of sand. We are keen for regular attendance from the members of our youth group. We want them to be committed to Christ and grow in their love for him and each other. However, the majority of us are on a constant treadmill of disappointment as our numbers are constantly shifting. We find it difficult to develop a deep sense of community because our 'committed' young people are so busy these days that we see them every other week (if we are lucky). We have 10 people one week, six the next. We hit an all-time high of 18 and then drop to four.

In addition to this, we hope that our group will grow as new people come, hear about Christ and stay. However, we rarely attract as many non-Christians as we would like. Those we do attract are often rowdy and come to the group with mixed motives ('a great social night', 'to meet the opposite sex' etc.).

We need to learn how to develop groups that are driven by a committed core of Christian young people who are eager to follow Christ.

Furthermore, much of our programming actually hinders the development of good relationships. Think about your group. Do the kids know each other well? Do they chase after someone who has not showed up for a few weeks? How about the humor in the group? Do they laugh with each other or at each other? When new people come, does the warmth of the relationships between group members immediately impact them? Is there a large amount of complaining within the group? Are there cliques that exclude other members of the youth group (or newcomers)? The Bible couldn't be clearer about the fact that our groups need to be places of kindness, selflessness and love. It is ironic, while we aim for love and Christian joy, we program for entertainment. We need to focus on a program that aims us towards a deeper walk with Jesus and where Christian love is fostered week by week.

Our goal is not to attract a horde of young people for a short-term buzz. It is to build a ministry that will be strong spiritually and last a long time. We need to see our youth ministry as an aircraft carrier, not a yacht. A yacht can go quickly but is fickle due to the winds. It will also flounder once the skipper leaves. An aircraft carrier is strong and sturdy and keeps moving forwards..

Fixing the problem!

Some of the above problems are large and it would be silly to suggest that there are easy solutions. However, there are ways of making our programs more effective. We must build our programs around solid Christian content. This will mean that we drop out 'pointless' activities and replace them with more fruitful ones. We must also work hard to develop a place where young people feel confident to share with others about what it means to be Christian. *Please remember, the corrective to many of our problems isn't to bore kids into spiritual oblivion.* Your goal is not to run long Bible studies and tedious prayer times. A boring program does not equal a good program. The correct strategy is to run a program that is filled with excellent Christian content and is enjoyable!

It is important to realize that youth ministry is hard work. However, the ideas in the following pages will have a greater chance of working if the leaders are committed to running a group that is thoroughly Christian and enjoyable at the same time. This book is designed to help you get rid of any straw in the weekly meeting. You must also be prepared to persevere for several weeks and months to see these new ideas for your weekly gathering take root and produce fruit. Furthermore, we all need God's help – keep praying that he will bless your efforts. (You may also want to find a copy of 'Changing the World Through Effective Youth Ministry'. This will provide a valuable foundation for these ideas.)

How this book will work

This book is designed to give you the practical tools to help you develop a youth group meeting that is clearly Christian, builds good community within the group, and is enjoyable. We will provide segments and programming content that will assist you to be effective in building the Kingdom of God in your area.

We will discuss how to put it all together to form an easy-to-run, well-structured time for your group.

We will focus on how to bring these elements into your weekly meeting and introduce change into your program.

It is important to note that the items in the following chapters occur in the order that they can appear in your weekly program (i.e. a Spotlight followed by a Bible game etc.).

There is a resource section in the back with questions, memory verses and other goodies to help you along. *Let's get to some of the 'how-to's'!*