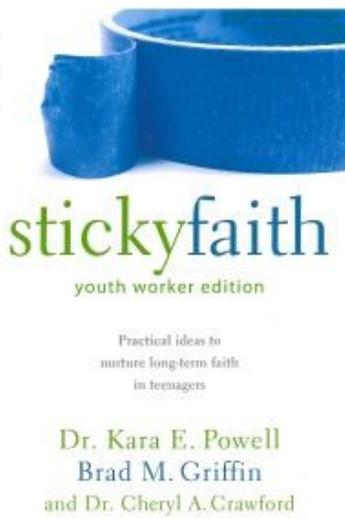


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Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition

CHAPTER 1: THE NOT SO STICKY FAITH REALITY



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kara Powell is the Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute and Assistant Professor of Youth and Family Ministry. Brad Griffin is the Associate Director of the Fuller Youth Institute. Cheryl Crawford is Associate Professor of Practical Theology and Youth Ministry at Azusa Pacific University.

As many as 50 percent of kids who are connected to a youth group when they graduate high school will fail to stick with their faith in college. Of these, between 30 and 60 percent will return to both faith and the church in their late twenties. Yet these young people will be dealing with the consequences of making major life decisions regarding marriage, employment, worldview, and lifestyle without the benefit of an active faith. While we celebrate those who return, we grieve the 40 to 70 percent who never do.

Each month just under 50 percent of college students abuse alcohol or drugs. These excesses connect directly to sexual activity. Although students who indicate religious involvement are less likely to consume alcohol or “hook up,” every one of the 69 youth group graduates we surveyed drank alcohol during their first two years of college. Key decisions about such involvements were made during the first two weeks of freshman year. Loneliness and search for friends are the primary reasons given for participating in these activities. Partying undoubtedly affects students’ relationships with God.

Where have we gone wrong? Are there things we could do differently to help students develop a faith that lasts?

Defining Sticky Faith

Sticky faith is both internal and external. It is part of a student’s inner thoughts and emotions, and is also displayed in choices and actions that reflect faith commitment. In short, Sticky Faith involves total life integration, at least to some degree.

Sticky Faith is both personal and communal. It is expressed in the realization of God’s specific care for the individual and partaking in the local and global community of the church.

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Sticky Faith is both mature and maturing. It shows marks of spiritual maturity but also reflects a process of growth. It would be naïve to think that teens transitioning from high school to college would have it all figured out or have a completely mature faith. We are all in process.

It's never too early

We realized early in our study that building Sticky Faith doesn't begin in high school. Students' faith lives are formed long before that. It's never too soon to apply the results shared in the rest of this book. Start early. Involve parents, senior adults, and any one with a heart for young people. It's time to stop the mass exodus of young people from the faith. It's time to build Sticky Faith.

A Loving and Faithful God

Realize that there are no easy answers or simple steps to building a lasting faith. The best answer is loving, trusting, and praying to a faithful God for wisdom, strength, and miracles. After all, it's the Holy Spirit who builds Sticky Faith, not us. Let's ask him to do so.

CHAPTER 2: THE STICKY GOSPEL

Sticky Findings

Many church kids have surprising views of what it means to be a Christian. When asked to define what it means to be a Christian, 35 percent didn't mention Jesus at all. The most common answer was to "love others." A lasting, long-term faith demands a more Jesus-centered view of the gospel.

Internal faith, not religious activities, matters most. Students who reported internal signs of embracing faith drank less. There was no relationship between religious acts (attending church, praying, reading Bible) and alcohol consumption. A sticky faith is an internalized faith.

Many youth group kids live by a gospel of "sin management." This superficial view of the gospel is merely a list of what they should and shouldn't do, a faith they can put on or take off as they feel like it. Often, this is the gospel we've modeled for them. No wonder they're not interested.

It's faith that leads to righteousness. Instead of focusing on getting students to "act right," we should help them strengthen their trust in Christ. Faith is the key to the Sticky Gospel. The concept of "trusting God" is easier for a young person to grasp than *faith* or *believe*. Help your students understand that every decision, every action comes down to this: Do I trust my own instincts and desires, or do I trust Christ? Trusting in Christ is the primary way for our students to develop their faith.

Spiritual disciplines are about trusting. Spiritual disciplines don't make us righteous because we do them. They put us in a position to draw close to God to learn to trust him more fully. It's about internal transformation more than external behaviors. Sticky Faith is about "trusting" before "doing."

Sticky Faith Made Practical: Through your teaching

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Explain your terms. If you throw out terms like “Lamb of God” or “sanctification” without explanation, they are likely to assume either that they are stupid, or that the Christian faith is incomprehensible. Either way, they will be less likely to stick around or take ownership for their faith.

Teach with an understanding of the context of Scriptures commands. In Paul’s epistles, the early chapters start with what God has done for us. The later chapters outline what we are to do in return. Who we are in Christ comes before our ability to act rightly. Teens need to know that their obedience flows out of their trust in God and the Holy Spirit’s work in them.

Use case studies that show what it means to trust God. Case studies that are set in school, home, or social situations help students to vicariously live out the principles you’re discussing. Ask students, “What would it look like to trust God in this situation? What would you say? What would you do? How would you explain your trust in God to the others involved?”

Expose students to real examples of others trusting God. Invite parents, college students, or other adults to share with the group how they are learning to trust God everyday. Testimonies of their faith journeys can be a powerful example.

Contrast “Good things Christians do” with “Trusting a good God.” The list of Christian “behavioral expectations” can be pretty overwhelming. Contrast that list with the freedom and trust Paul describes in Galatians 5. Move students from “things they try to do” to “trusting God.” Ask over and over in your teaching, “What does it look like to trust God with. . . Your money? Your time? This mission trip? Your weekend plans? Your social media habits? Your friendships?”

Teach about repentance and recovery. Teens are going to mess up. If they live by “sin management,” they’ll eventually be tempted to give up. Help them understand that the love of God is bigger than any sin we commit. Help them find a safe relationship to share their struggles so that they can find a haven of acceptance and restoration.

Take advantage of teachable moments

In your conversations, focus on “trusting God” before “obeying God.” Rather than being quick to give behavioral advice, ask students, “What do you think it would mean to trust Christ with this issue? Where do you think Jesus is in this situation?” Help students respond to their circumstances in trust.

Get past “Sunday school answers.” If you think a student is just telling you what you want to hear, you can push him or her to go deeper by asking “Why” or “What makes you say that?” Playing devil’s advocate to uncover students’ true thoughts and feelings can build their faith.

Express your trust and belief in your students. Every time your students share their struggles and failures we have the opportunity to express our trust and belief in them and in the God who is still working in and through them.

When surveyed about the influence of their youth groups, activities and youth talks were rarely mentioned. What was mentioned was the example of the youth leader—not so much what they said or did, but *who they were*. Modeling your trust-centered faith will give hope and direction to your students.

CHAPTER 3: STICKY IDENTITY

Sticky Findings

Identity is more than just nature and nurture. Identity development is a complex process. It includes physical components (genetic makeup, hair, height, weight) and environmental components (family background, social environment). Identity is both an individual and communal phenomenon. But a complete picture of identity development is not possible without God.

Spiritual development is deeply connected to identity development. But it is less understood. God works in each individual's life in unique ways. This can neither be programmed nor predicted.

The identity formation process lasts longer. The breadth of peer relationships (through social media and ease of transportation) means that teens receive too much and inconsistent feedback. Lacking the consistency and security they need, many young people delay identity formation until college or later.

Freshman year vs. junior high? The loneliness and insecurity that many college freshman experience often mirrors that of junior high school. To gain acceptance, both segments often engage in partying to find friends.

Sense of identity moves through four stages. *Diffusion* occurs when a young person does not explore nor commit to any identity. *Foreclosure* occurs when a teen prematurely accepts the identity of parents or culture, without exploring options. *Moratorium* is a phase of exploration without having made any identity commitments. *Achievement* results when a teens resolves the process of exploration by making clear commitments. All four stages may coexist in various areas of a teen's life. Know that the resulting confusion is part of the process of the young person deciding who they want to be.

Students often put faith on hold while deciding who they want to be, whether to gain acceptance or "enjoy life." In so doing, young people make decisions disconnected from their true selves, are easily swayed by temptations of the culture, and often live with regrets from decisions made.

Identity is ultimately rooted in God's love and call. The two driving needs of identity are to be valued as unique and to belong. God's view of our students satisfies both needs. We are to help our young in the lifelong process of finding themselves as *beloved children of God*.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

What can we do to help teens in these transition years to live as God's children rather than delay the identity development process or put faith on hold?

Develop rituals and rites of passage. Churches are in a special position to support young people through life transitions. Rituals help tell us who we are and assist in transmitting a sense of identity and God's love.

Rites for entering or leaving adolescence. Entering middle school and graduating from high school are

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excellent opportunities for the church to officially recognize a young person's new status. Retreats, parent-child experiences, special worship rituals, or gender-specific events could all be used.

Rituals for special milestones. Getting a driver's license and turning 16 are opportunities to communicate to a young person, "We celebrate with you and will continue to walk with you on your journey." Baptisms and confessions of faith are times to celebrate that they are part of the family of faith. Including or even involving them in communion is a way to bless their incorporation into the Body.

Identify your kids' passions and gifts. Provide strategic activities that help them acknowledge their interests, abilities, and gifts. Connect them with an adult in the church with similar interests. Plugging into their passions will give their faith experience meaning, energy, and joy.

Seek variety in adult leaders. Being in relationship with a variety of adults helps youth see how God works uniquely in each life. It allows them to investigate who they can be as Christians rather than assuming they have to be just like you.

Support long-term stability in your adult leaders. Long-term relationships with adults help sustain faith in teens. Consider a 4 +1 paradigm. This means ministering to teens for the four years of high school plus *at least* the first year of college. An additional year of support with an adult from the student ministry provides critical support during a difficult transition.

Pay attention to events that promote identity growth. Significant struggles can promote faith growth. Exposure to different ways of thinking or multicultural environments, relationship, health, or emotional challenges can create internal crises that lead to identity development. Help youth process these events in transformative ways.

CHAPTER 4: STICKY CHURCHES

In our efforts to provide relevant activities for teenagers we have unintentionally segregated them from the rest of the church. And that segregation is causing them to leave the church when they leave the youth group.

Sticky Findings

To Jesus, greatness involves adults and children. In Luke 9 Jesus says that greatness comes from welcoming a child. To welcome means to show hospitality and implies servanthood. How's your church doing at truly welcoming the younger generations?

Involvement in all-church worship is linked with mature faith in young people. More than any other form of church participation, high school and college youth who experience more intergenerational worship have higher faith maturity.

Serving younger children creates faith that sticks in teenagers. Serving and building relationships in the middle school and children's ministries while they were in high school resulted in stickier faith in college. Involvement with children is more than baby-sitting; it's faith building.

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High school seniors don't feel supported by adult congregants. Of five sources of support (adults, parents, youth workers, friends in the youth group, friends outside of group), seniors ranked adults in the congregation last in terms of support. And by a wide margin.

The main way churches make teens feel welcome is when adults show an interest in them. More than any program or event, what made kids feel valued in their church was when adults made an effort to get to know them and welcomed them into other ministries of the church.

Contact from adults in the church makes a difference. Contact from an adult outside of the youth ministry during the first semester in college is linked to sticky faith. Whether it's email, text, mail, phone call this ongoing contact makes a difference.

Finding a church is a major difficulty for college freshman. Friendship, aloneness, and finding a church were the top three difficulties reported in our study. Youth ministry kids may know youth group, but they don't know church or how to find one.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

Chap Clark talks of “reversing the youth ministry ratio.” Instead of the usual “one adult for every five kids,” what if we had a “five to one” ratio? This doesn't mean five adults for every teen at meetings and events, but rather five adults who are willing to invest in the life of one teenager in a variety of ways. Teens who have five adults invested in them are less likely to leave the church. Ideally, parents will be integrally responsible for linking their kids to caring adults.

Changing your church culture starts at the top. If you want your church to embrace the 5:1 paradigm, you'll have to get the support of your church leadership. They control the culture of your church. If your pastor isn't supportive of intergenerational ministry perhaps you can have them read a book or attend an event on the topic and then debrief with them.

Nuancing what you already do. Rather than adding new programs, look at what you're doing and consider how it can be made more intergenerational. Look at the youth ministry calendar and then the church calendar for events, programs, ministries, or services that can incorporate the generations.

5:1 teaching. Perhaps invite the various generations in your Sunday school to study God's word together. Allow teens to share their passions and involvements or even lead some singing.

5:1 worship. Every church should ask how they can increase adult-teen interaction during worship. Maybe you cancel your teen worship service so the whole body worships together. Adults and teens can serve as greeters, give testimonies, be involved in music ministry and other areas of involvement.

5:1 mentoring. The more adult mentors seek out students to help them apply faith to life, the stickier their faith. Whether it's an hour a week or a few hours a year, provide ways for adults and kids to spend intentional time together.

Other 5:1 ideas. Allow parents to attend youth meetings any time they want. Invite them to take part in your next retreat. Match teens and adults as prayer partners who regularly exchange requests.

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Have your teens offer technology tutoring to adult congregants who desire it. On occasion, allow the teens to join children's worship, allowing both generations to be involved in worship, announcements, or teaching. Schedule an all-church camping outing. Allow teens to serve on committees.

Final thoughts

In a typical church, teens and senior adults are often similar in that both groups can feel marginalized. Many 5:1 ideas can revolve around uniting these two groups. Both groups tend to have a tender spot for the other, and both groups benefit from the relationship. Lastly, service/justice work is a great starting point for intergenerational relationships. When working together, any age-related awkwardness tends to disappear. Let's look at opportunities for sticky justice.

CHAPTER 5: STICKY JUSTICE

More than 2 million teens go on mission trips each year. Unfortunately, research shows that for more than 80% of them, the trips have little effect on their daily lives.

Sticky Findings

Our understanding of service and justice is too narrow. We sometimes take the first step of helping those in need, but rarely progress to a long-term, systemic approach that seeks to promote sustainable justice or lasting change.

Justice is a biblical theme. Justice is a core attribute of God, mentioned dozens of times throughout Scripture. Evangelicals tend to be nervous about justice, thinking it is characteristic of "liberal" approaches to the gospel. It's a word that the church has to reclaim.

Kids want to be involved in service and justice. When surveyed as to activities they wish they had more of in youth group, seniors listed deep conversations, mission trips, and service projects as the top three. Games were last. If you're struggling to retain upperclassmen, service may be the way.

If kids aren't serving, it may be because we're not asking. 93 percent of teens who were asked to volunteer and serve by someone close to them, did so. So instead of only making large-group announcements, or mass emails/texts, perhaps we should do more face-to-face asking if they'd like to join us.

Our current attempts at service aren't sticking like we'd hoped. Research shows that our service and justice work hasn't resulted in growth of career missionaries nor reduced teens' materialism.

Service is stickier when it hits close to home. Justice will tend to stick when it involves issues that have touched them or their friends personally. Give teens the chance to right the wrongs already around them, showing them how the injustices relate to their lives. Expose them to actual people who have been oppressed. Lastly, teens report that they are more likely to serve when encouraged to do so by their parents, and when given the opportunity to work with their friends.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

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Service work tends to stick when it's not an event but a process. We need to do a better job of walking with students before, during, and after their mission experiences. See a weekend project more as a three month process. See a week's mission trip as a seven-month journey of preparation. Through the entire process your goal is to offer support and feedback as students express their needs in response to what they are experiencing. You're in a great position to offer much needed perspective.

Before: framing. Help students prepare for the mind-blowing and menial experiences that await them. Facilitate a series of meetings and events that prepare students emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and relationally for what they will face.

During: experience and reflection. During their actual service they will have a cycle of experiences and reflection. Make sure students have time to catch their breath and reflect on the meaning of their observations, thoughts, and feelings. Ask them questions that help them clarify what they are seeing.

After: debrief and ongoing transformation. The ride home is the best time to begin debriefing, to start thinking through what you want to stick long term. If few groups prepare well beforehand, even less give attention to transformation after. Students themselves won't know how to translate what they've experienced in mission to their own lives. Help them connect what working with that homeless person may mean for interacting with lonely people in their own life.

Sticky causes. Kids can best be engaged with causes they can identify with personally. What issues strike close to home with your students? Poverty? Sex trafficking? Tutoring? Racism? Justice is more likely to stick if students have opportunity to right the wrongs around them in an ongoing way.

Sticky, ongoing relationships. Develop real and ongoing relationships with the people who host you for mission experiences. There is staying power in long-term connections. Some churches send groups from various ministries in the church to the same site throughout the year to encourage this kind of relationship with a certain location.

CHAPTER 6: STICKY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Our church culture often allows parents to outsource the spiritual development of their kids to youth leaders. We need to equip parents to responsibly disciple their own teens.

Sticky Findings

Parents are the most important influence in their kids' lives. The research is definitive in showing that the most important influence in shaping the spiritual lives of teens is the spiritual life modeled and taught by their parents.

Most parents miss out on the opportunity to talk about faith with their kids. One in eight kids talk to their Moms about faith. One in twenty talk to Dad. Only 9 percent of teens engage in devotions with their families.

The best discussions don't just ask questions, but share experiences. Parents shouldn't just interview

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their kids, but discuss their own faith journeys, including the highs and lows.

Christian parents are less likely than others to talk about difficult subjects. Data indicates that the more important faith is to parents, the more difficult it is for them to discuss sex with their kids. Fear, business, and not knowing how all contribute to this unfortunate phenomenon.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

You may have been aware that parents are the most significant influence in the lives of their teens, but how is this knowledge translating into how you use your time? What are you doing to help parents develop Sticky Faith in their kids?

Plant the Vision. One of the best ways to leverage your time with parents is share stories of other innovative parents that are engaging Sticky Faith in their young people.

Help parents make time for quality conversation. This doesn't mean "hope" that such time emerges. You have to make time. Parents can set aside a weekly time with the goal of simply having fun and talking. Parents and teens can ask life questions of each other over some mutually enjoyable activity.

Help parents talk about their own faith. Again, the goal is mutual conversation, not an interview. "How did you see God working today?" or "How can I be praying for you?" are good introductory questions. Be sure your kids get to hear your answers to these questions as well. Help parents to not lecture but to listen and ask good questions. The best conversations happen in the midst of everyday life.

Give parents tools to succeed in their conversations. Send them youth culture updates or tips to help them understand their young person. Debrief with them, either in person or by email, after big events so they have things to discuss with their kids. Encourage parents to check in with you, or you can initiate contact to let them know what's happening and empower them to ask better questions.

How do I help parents whose kids don't want to talk to them. All teens go through seasons of this and it can be painful. A good place to start is discussing an interest of the teen. Movies? Concerts? Take them to one and discuss in the car.

Help parents develop their own Sticky Faith rituals. Help parents develop creative or spontaneous rituals that allow them to spend uninterrupted time with their teen or so their teen can spend time with other 5:1 adults in meaningful ways. These might be breakfasts with Dad, special dinners with other adults, workplace visits with mentors. One parent asked friends and relatives to give her teen experiences rather than presents on birthdays. Be creative!

Tough questions related to Sticky Families

What do I do when I don't want my youth to have the faith of their parents? It's certainly unfortunate if the parents' faith is weak or uninspiring. A best first step is to talk with your pastor and try to develop a plan that will pinpoint parents' weak faith. If you're dealing with parents who don't yet know the Lord, remember that Christian kids can be a catalyst for their parents' faith. In the meantime, these kids should be at the top of the list for 5:1 relationships with other Christian adults.

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How do I help parents whose kids have already shelved their faith? Far more important than parents badgering them to attend church or youth group is keeping relational lines open. Parents can let their teen know that they love them and are there for them no matter what

CHAPTER 7: STICKY YOUTH GROUPS

Is it possible that some of what we think makes a good youth ministry is actually sabotaging students' faith? What really counts in youth ministry when it comes to developing a faith that lasts?

Sticky Findings

Students show up because they like you. Eighty percent of youth cited "I like the youth pastor" as the top reason for being part of a youth ministry. As great as this sounds, is it the best way to develop Sticky Faith? Are our ministries centered on us or Jesus? What happens to kids' faith when the charismatic youth leader moves on? This fallout has played itself out repeatedly in countless ministries.

Students also show up because they want to connect with God. The next four reasons teens come: they want to learn about God, they feel comfortable there, they can worship God there, they've always gone. Although a couple of those smack of complacency, there's also a desire to meet God!

Only one in five students felt "My youth leaders really knew me." Despite feeling drawn to us, they feel unknown, overlooked. When teens feel known by adults, the positive effects to faith development last for years.

Help students apply faith to life. Feeling sought out by adults and having help in applying faith to daily life were two factors directly related to Sticky Faith over time.

Kids don't feel as close to youth group friends as we think. Peers in youth group are not a big reason for attendance (ranked 16th), nor are they seen as a key source of support (ranked 4th out of five). Yet, looking back, students remember youth group friendships fondly.

What do students want more of from youth ministry? The top five: Time for deep conversation, mission trips, service projects, accountability, one-on-one time with leaders. Games were last on the list.

Retreat experiences are key. Most leaders count on retreats to build faith momentum. Turns out they're right. Retreats are one of the few activities that directly correlate with Sticky Faith.

Student leaders tend to stick with faith. Students who led in their youth ministry or served with middle school or elementary kids showed stronger faith three years later than those who didn't.

Students spend very little time in spiritual disciplines. Less than half prayed daily. Only 12 percent read their Bibles daily. These figures are fairly constant for both high school and college.

Most kids doubt their faith but few talk about it. Seven in ten young people expressed struggling with doubts concerning their faith, but only one in ten had a helpful conversation about it. But research

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shows that encouraging the expression of doubts and struggles actually promotes Sticky Faith.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

Let's look at the implications of Sticky Findings in terms of building a Sticky Youth Group environment, fostering Sticky Relationships, and reimagining Sticky Programs.

Building a Sticky Youth Group Environment

Create a place where doubts can be shared without fear. Students who feel safe to express their doubts have a stronger faith in college. Why do many of us think faith is the absence of doubt? Open the floor regularly for kids to ask hard questions, or provide an “honesty box” if your youth would prefer to do so anonymously. Teach about doubt in the Bible and talk about global issues that raise questions about God's goodness. Practice Scriptural lament in response to pain, suffering, and doubt. Take time to “check in” by having teens ask each other “How are you doing really.” Practice listening well.

Center our ministries in prayer and Scripture. Too often prayer is a token way we start or end our meetings. Check out Mark Yaconelli's work with the Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project for ideas on making prayer and Scriptural meditation more central to your ministry.

Train volunteers in basic listening and counseling skills. If our young peoples' stated value is time and conversation with caring adults, then we need to be prepared to handle these times well.

Offer a balance of support and challenge. Environments of challenge without support can be toxic. Support without challenge will be boring. Vital growth involves balancing the two.

Fostering Sticky Relationships

Can I trust you? In nearly every interaction you have with young people, they'll want to know “Can I trust you?” Make building this trust a cornerstone of your youth ministry relationships

Be Jesus-centered rather than leader-centered. If you need to be liked, you'll be tempted to keep yourself at the center of your ministry. If you emphasize bringing glory to God, your students will be free to create dependence on him instead of you.

Think creatively about volunteer recruiting. If long-term relationships with adults matter, older leaders can be very valuable. They may have more time, more life experience, and are more likely to still be in the church five years later when compared to the college-age leaders.

Rethink how you build community. We all talk a great deal about building community, but are you able to do so in ways that don't involve just food or games? How do you create lasting spiritual bonds?

Reimagining Sticky Programs

Get them off site. Retreats and extended time away provide time for deep conversations, space for sharing doubts, building community, and focusing on Jesus—all our Sticky Faith goals.

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Give students opportunities to lead. Empowering youth develops competency and confidence. But the leadership opportunities must be meaningful. Making an occasional announcement or manning a sign-up table do little to promote faith ownership. Also make sure that getting youth involved isn't just giving them "one more thing to do" that will promote burnout. Help them see leadership as servanthood.

Program less. What program(s) do you need to give up to provide time and space for the kind of relational depth that promotes Sticky Faith? Regularly evaluate your calendar to prevent times of hyper-programming and provide time for planning, preparation, and retreat.

CHAPTER 8: STICKY SENIORS

Many churches may offer a "Graduation Sunday" or "Senior Dinner" for their graduates but do little else to prepare students to think about life and faith after leaving youth group.

Sticky Findings

Only one in seven graduates leave youth group feeling "very prepared" for college life. This is unfortunate because the more prepared students feel, the more likely their faith is to grow.

Seniors want our help. The number one advice graduates listed for youth leaders was to better prepare other graduates. Specifically, students desired structured training on college transition.

Graduates from our youth groups want to hear from us. A quarter of graduates who reported desiring ongoing contact received none. Such contact during freshman year is a strong predictor of Sticky Faith

The first two weeks of college set the stage for several years. Decisions about church attendance and participation in drinking are most often made during this crucial period.

Most students don't know how to find a church. This task was listed as one of the biggest difficulties of college transition. Forty percent felt ill-equipped to find a church home.

Engaging in church or campus ministry during freshman year is positively linked with Sticky Faith. Unfortunately, less than half of former youth group students report doing so the fall of their first year.

Managing daily life is overwhelming and leaves little time to think about faith. Half of students felt anxious because so much was left for them to decide. They struggled most to integrate faith with time and money management.

Encountering students who believe differently tends to strengthen faith. We often fear that exposure to such diversity will weaken faith. The opposite seems to be true.

Sticky Faith Made Practical

We've divided strategies to promote sticky faith in seniors into three groups: ongoing series—like a senior's small group, one-time events—like a senior ceremony, and post-graduation ideas.

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Ongoing Series or Small Groups

Weekly senior gathering. A regular time during senior year for fellowship, support, and discussion of college-transition topics. You can invite campus pastors or previous graduates to come share their perspectives. Many include skill-building sessions such as shopping, doing laundry, handling money.

Mentoring partnerships. Pair seniors with adults from the congregation with the expectation that the relationship will continue at least through the first year after high school.

Church visits. During the summer after graduation, visit other church services together so that seniors can begin to think through what is important to them in finding a church at college.

College tours. Some youth leaders take students on tours of college campuses. While you're there, visit churches near the campus as well.

Church transitions. Consider transitioning seniors to adult small groups or positions of leadership in the children's ministry so that they can experience contributing to the full church as emerging adults.

One-time Events and Rites of Passage

All-church worship services. This is the most common way of recognizing seniors. Consider having graduates share their faith stories or how they've been shaped by the congregation. Invite parents and other significant adults to pray for and bless seniors. Some churches present seniors with photo albums that chronicle their times at the church.

Senior Blessing. Family friends, and youth leaders attend a ceremony in which parents read letters that they have written to bless their child. Other attendees can then share to bless each student.

Rite of passage events. Consider taking seniors away on an overnight trip that allows for reflection and journaling instead of just fun. Some churches have done camping or wilderness adventures that offer a significant challenge, or a seniors-only mission trip after graduation.

Post-graduation Ideas

Ongoing mentoring. As mentioned above, if you establish mentoring relationships in your church, make sure they continue past graduation.

On-campus gatherings. Hold periodic gatherings on college campuses for the freshman from your church to check-in and encourage them.

Intentional, regular contact. Letters, texts, phone calls, social media, care packages! Start an "adopt-a-college-student" program that ensures each student has consistent contact from home.

Holiday gatherings. Christmas, Thanksgiving, spring break, and summer vacation present special opportunities to reconnect with graduates to share stories, worship, or pray together. It's a chance to encourage students who may be struggling and assure them of your church's ongoing support.

CHAPTER 9: THE PATH TO STICKY CHANGE

You will likely nod in agreement with many of the findings in this book and yet struggle with the question, “How do we bring change to our youth ministries and our churches?” This isn’t just about youth ministry. We can’t reach the goal of Sticky Faith if congregations aren’t walking with us. Yet most churches aren’t looking to their youth pastor to blaze the path. How do we affect change?

The Power of Story

Vision can’t be separated from story because vision is a “shared story of future hope.” Continually keep two kinds of stories before your people: Stories of God at work today and Stories of your hope for the future. Where do you already see Sticky Faith being lived out in your midst? Affirm the good work God is doing in your midst and use it to challenge the church toward an intergenerational future. Then dream about the future God has for you. Share these stories as regularly, broadly, and specifically as possible with parents, small groups, leadership meetings, and before the whole church. You have more power than you think to bring about change through the stories you tell.

Build a Sticky Faith Team

You can’t accomplish change in your church on your own. You need to build a team. Your team might include your pastor, worship leader, Sunday school coordinator, missions chair, parents, your adult volunteers, and a few key students. We recommend including folks from your children’s ministry as it is never too early to begin incorporating principle of Sticky Faith.

What Do You Do With Your Team?

Your team will undoubtedly meet regularly for the purpose of promoting Sticky Faith goals.

- Pray
- Tell new stories that can be shared to reflect your vision
- Report on the work done since last meeting
- Assign tasks to be completed and then reported at the next meeting
- Evaluate the momentum and pace of change

Identify Advocates and Obstacles

Change always brings two responses: some love it, some hate it. Don’t try to avoid or argue with those who oppose you. Instead, seek to understand their concerns. Trying to convince someone of your viewpoint often has the opposite effect. Make sure you understand their point of view, and that they *believe* that you understand. Summarize their view and ask them to clarify. The only way forward is to look for common ground that results in mutually satisfactory solutions.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

It’s impossible to over-communicate. Whatever you think you need to communicate, double it to be

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successful. Whether it's regular emails, parent meetings, or announcements, communicate each step of the way. In your communication, be as encouraging as possible. Share both research findings and the faith stories you developed earlier. Share prayer requests and invite folks to contact you with questions or comments

Experiment

Your goal is systemic change, but that rarely happens all at once. Chances are you will need to experiment to build momentum. Try piloting your program in one small group, or one grade of kids, or a handful of families. You'll be able to nurture the things that go well and you'll garner more positive stories to tell to other audiences. You'll want to communicate how these new approaches have strengthened families and their kids' relationships with Jesus. Seek to get as many people on board and headed in the same direction as you can. Through it all, be patient. Any good change takes time. Probably twice as much time as you think it will.

CORNER

CROZ'S

Sticky Faith addresses head-on the most pressing need in youth ministry today: How do we establish a faith in our young people that lasts far beyond their graduation from our youth group? In so doing, Powell and company have produced one of the most influential youth ministry books of the last 15 years. You're reading the "Youth Worker" edition. They have produced separate books and DVD curricula for parents, teens, and churches as well. If you're sold on the Sticky Faith principles, they have all the resources you need to begin to the process of systemic change in your church.

I hope this book does lead you to want to make some changes. But I would urge you to go slowly and wisely. Begin by getting your head pastor and other church leaders on board. Listen to the needs and opinions of your stakeholders. Understand your church culture. Many a well-meaning youth pastor has launched headlong into making dramatic changes only to do irreparable damage to their ministry or reputation.

And yet change we must. The church dropout rate after high school demands that we carefully examine what we've been doing and what needs to change to produce a lasting faith in our young people. I would suggest carefully examining the final chapter on making change, or the similar chapter in *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, or any book on organizational/ministry change. Do your due background diligence and then go for it!