



A Theology for SDA Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Many people feel intimidated by the word "theology." Knowing it has something to do with God, most retreat or go silent, feeling certain that others are more qualified to speak to the topic or maybe feeling fearful one would say something wrong.

But we all "do theology." All of us have opinions and respond to what happens in life. Regardless of whether or not we consider ourselves to be godly, we either deny the supernatural or explain it in ways that make sense to us. Sometimes God seems distant and at other times She seems close. We have rather entrenched ideas about God's gender as well, right?!

Rather than limiting "theology" to ivory towers for scholars, broaden your understanding to include your world. Just as God came to earth in the form of Jesus through the incarnation, God comes to us in our everyday lives today as well. Jesus got hungry and thirsty, tired and refreshed. He identified with us. Let's identify with Him.

A Model Needs a Theology

A model for ministry needs to be much more than just a good idea or a plan or a structure. It needs to be rooted in how God operates. Some rely on God's previous activity in one's life as the reference point. We live in a time in which most of us have ready access

to God's activity and special revelation over hundreds of years. The Bible offers a treasure trove of God's activity and how humans interface and respond to God. We'll go to Scripture for authority and then make comparisons to our lives today for an understanding of how God acts.

Rather than taking an isolated verse or story upon which to create a theology, we do better to note themes and consistencies God has revealed. For instance, Jephthah's vow to sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing that came out of his house if God provided victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11:30-31) wouldn't be a good basis for youth and young adult ministry! It certainly didn't turn out that way for his young daughter (Judges 11:34-40). Just because it can be found in the Bible doesn't make it a model to emulate. The Bible contains many examples of bad models. The Israelites worship of the golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai can be found in Scripture (Exodus 32:1-6). But this record shows us what not to do rather than what to do.

We could also use examples from the New Testament. Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all he had, give it to the poor, and then come follow Jesus (Luke 18:22). Some take this as the model for how to relate to possessions if you would be a true follower of Jesus. Yet Zacchaeus offered half of his goods to the poor and Jesus pronounced that salvation had come to his house (Luke 19:8-9). In further contrast, the demon-possessed man Jesus cleansed had nothing to sell, but he offered to follow Jesus. Yet Jesus refused and sent him back home (Luke 8:38-39). All three of these incidences with Jesus are recorded in the Gospel of Luke. They seem inconsistent for establishing a model for youth and young adult ministry. The details vary considerably. But they do contain some similar themes. For example, each instance involved a dramatic change from life before Christ in contrast to life after Christ. And each instance created a decision that would be difficult for the potential follower of Jesus—something the individual would need divine support in order to maintain. And each instance provided choice even though not every individual made a good choice.

Doing theology often necessitates that we wrestle with the text and with the story, as well as our own story in order to ascertain how God operates as well as how we will relate to how God works. While professional theologians might provide insights into God, we need God-lovers and God-followers to help us understand how to live for God as we seek to identify models based on how God does things. Read and live; live and read. Pray and practice; practice and pray.

The Process We Followed

Our group chose to root our theology in the Bible and then compare that to our various life experiences in ministry in order to arrive at a theology for youth and young adult ministry. With representation from each

subgroup, we worked independently and then together to forge this theology. We didn't come up with identical material that miraculously blended when we compared notes. But as we discussed our work and our understandings of God, the kingdom of God became the unifying theme. From that core, the components quickly emerged and the crucial wording came together more quickly than what seemed typical. Perhaps these were the miracles in the process.

Because each member in the group identifies with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), we labeled this "A Theology for SDA Youth and Young Adult Ministry" although nobody and no entity gave us this task in an official manner. We offer it as our foundation/theology for the models for youth and young adult ministry that follow.

To the extent that others identify and adopt any or all of this, we offer it as a useful tool. Basing this on Scripture provides common ground for all Christians. Testing it from our collection of ministry experiences potentially makes it unique for those who came together for the Center for Youth Evangelism (CYE) 180° Symposium October 19-21, 2010, at Andrews University. For those who would prefer to simply criticize, spend your time and energy coming up with your own theology and get on with ministering to youth and young adults.

Here It Is!

The full theology for SDA youth and young adult ministry follows in a moment. Take it and unpack each line and every sentence. Ask yourself how this compares to what God has already revealed. What additional Scripture would you add? What has God called you to do right now? What is God's desire for youth and young adults today?

The shortened version reads like this:

What it's all about: the kingdom of God!

What we do:

1. Prepare for
2. Present to
3. Participate in

Here's the complete version. This provides the foundation for the models that follow.

A Theology for SDA Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adult ministry finds its calling in the kingdom of God. It prepares, presents, and participates in the kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD – Christ's disciples today proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand, just as they did 2,000 years ago. This kingdom is not of this world, but it is in the world. It is near, coming, present, within us, and beyond us. It calls us and it sends us. It is already here, and yet it is still to come. It is the presence of God Himself.

PREPARE – *We prepare youth and young adults for the kingdom of God.* Like John the Baptist, we prepare others as well as ourselves for the kingdom of God. The status quo must change. We live in anticipation of Christ's coming. Transformation begins. Our paradigm shifts when we prepare for the kingdom of God. We live differently and treat others differently.

PRESENT – *We present to youth and young adults the kingdom of God.* The love of Christ compels us to share the good news that the kingdom of God is already here in God's goodness, and yet it is also still coming in God's glory. This motivation drives us to contextualize and skillfully communicate the kingdom by sharing and living kingdom values here and now in authentic ways. Christ demonstrates reconciliation to and through kingdom citizens by grace. While the time is

now, the kingdom continues to unfold. We invite others to join by responding to Christ's invitation, "Come, follow Me."

PARTICIPATE – *We join with youth and young adults to participate in the kingdom of God.* When we respond to Christ's invitation, we become citizens of the kingdom of God. Our new identity places us into something much bigger than ourselves or our previous world. Relationships take priority as we share, cooperate and collaborate in cross-cultural and intergenerational ways, equipped by the Holy Spirit. We become part of the family of God, replacing our own instincts with kingdom values. By inclusively participating in the life of God, we experience incarnational community. While God is near and even within, He also sends us to share His kingdom with others in the world.

Based on:

Joshua 24:1-25

Malachi 4:5-6

Matthew 5-7

Matthew 10:5-26

Matthew 28:19-20

Mark 1:14-20

Luke 3:2-18

1 Corinthians 12-13

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Ephesians 1:7-14

Colossians 1:12-14

1 John 1-2

1 John 4:8-21

Revelation 14:6-12.

