

TIM HAWKINS

fruit
that will last

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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How to grow fruit that will last

SECTION

1

Chapter 1

The one question I forgot to ask

The first day

"Here is our new youth pastor!" I stepped forward at my new church to thunderous applause. There were teenagers all over the place. Excited that I was there. But their enthusiasm was nothing compared with how good I was feeling.

"This is it!" I told myself. "No longer am I merely some small group leader in the back-blocks of junior-high ministry. I've made it!"

Years of study (well... not that many years... and come to think of it... not that much study!) had prepared me for this moment. I WAS THE NEW YOUTH PASTOR! Head honcho. In charge. King of the kids. A new direction in youth ministry.

I had dreamed about this. I had pictured myself sitting down in the gutter with some street kid who would see the error of his ways and discover Christ in a radical conversion. I imagined the busloads of teenagers who would come to the stadium because I was going to speak. All the "old ways" of youth ministry were gone. I was here. Yes, humble, Christlike, a servant of all, but I was going to make a success of it where others had failed. All the boring bits of youth ministry were gone. I was going to launch a dynamic thunderbolt which would shatter the stereotypes and move Christian youth ministry into the world of tomorrow.

Not for my own glory, of course. I truly wanted to serve Christ. As long as they got my name right on the programme!

More than 30 years later

I can't believe how self-centred I was then. More than 30 years later I can look back with amazement that God has kept me in youth ministry for this long. Many of my colleagues seem to have fallen by the wayside. Those young, ambitious youth pastors who started out with me all seem to be doing other things. Some have gone back to “real jobs” (you know, the sort that pay “real money”!) Some have moved on to “real ministry” (they're now “real” pastors in “real” churches). Many, sadly, have left their ministry. Some have walked away from Christ altogether.

God has left me here. Why? Maybe he won't let me leave youth ministry until I get it right! (Do you get the suspicion that I'm a slow learner?) God has taught me so much over the three decades that I have been a youth pastor of a local church. This book reflects over 30 years of learning—and I'm really keen as to what the next 30 years will bring. If only someone had told me all this stuff when I first started! But then again, I'm not sure I would have listened!

The one question we all want to ask

Whenever youth pastors and youth leaders get together, there's always one question that you're dying to ask. Some of you are brazen enough to come right out and ask it: others of us are reserved and shy and only dream about asking it. But for every youth leader, this is a burning question that you want to ask any youth leader from another church—and you really want to know the answer.

Here it is—in blazing black and white. The question that bugs us all:

How many kids in your youth group?

There! I've said it! But be honest. You really want to know, don't you? And you're desperately hoping that they will give you a number that is a little lower than the number that come to your youth group.

True?

When your fellow youth leader from another church gives you an answer to your question, you'd really like to be able to answer, "Oh! That's a great number! You should be very encouraged! I can remember when our group only had that many!"

Ouch! It's not that all us youth leaders are megalomaniacs. Deep down, being better than the other guy is not what drives us. Nearly every youth pastor I meet has a genuine desire to serve Jesus. An honest passion to build young disciples. A genuine drive to make a difference in the lives of students. And it is this desire, this passion, this drive that steers us towards asking dumb questions like: "*How many kids in your youth group?*"

We ask it **because we desperately want to know that we're doing okay.**

Why are you in youth ministry? For most of you, you genuinely love Jesus, and you genuinely love students, and you want to be able to bring the two of them together. You know it really matters. Depending on which survey you read, up to 85% of people who will become Christians in their life will do so before their 18th birthday. Youth ministry is vitally important. That's why you're doing it!

That's why you went to the conference. That's why you're reading the book.

The stakes are very high

Because you really care about what you're doing, you need to know that you're going okay. And we all work out that the dude with the biggest youth ministry must be doing okay. Right?

Well, I want you to relax. Take a deep breath. Soak in the next sentence. Ready?

God doesn't care how many kids are in your youth group.

Read it again. **God doesn't care how many kids are in your youth group.**

Huh?

Imagine that you are no longer a youth leader, but you are a fruit grower. You own an orchard, and you grow fruit. Around you there are lots of other fruit growers. They all have orchards, and they all grow fruit. Some have big orchards, some have small orchards. But you all grow fruit.

How do you work out whether you are doing your job well? How do you know if you are a good fruit grower? If there is a local fair, where there is a "*Best Fruit Grower*" award, how will the judges determine who wins?

No one gives a rat's armpit how many trees you have in your orchard! Here is the important question: **What sort of fruit are you producing?** What is the quality of your fruit? Is it good fruit? And more importantly—will it last? No one wants fruit that will start to smell after a few days!

The farmer who's got 300 fruit trees in his orchard—but produces low-quality fruit that goes rotten within a few days of picking—that's not the place where you'll go and buy your produce! They'll never win any award! But the farmer who only has 100 fruit trees but produces large quantities of good quality fruit that lasts for weeks... there's your prize winner! That's the place to go shopping! That's where you get fruit that really satisfies!

Can you see that the number of fruit trees in the orchard makes not one scrap of difference as to how good the fruit-grower is? It is the quality of the fruit. Yes, numbers do make a difference, but what if the farmer with 100 trees is producing more fruit and better fruit than the farmer with 300 trees? An orchard with fruitless trees is of no use to anyone!

God doesn't care how many are in your group, but:

***God cares incredibly about the
quality of your fruit.***

Just before he died, Jesus instructed his followers about the lives they were to lead, and the ministry they were to have.

He said:

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed
you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.*

John 15:16

Are you special, or what? Jesus has chosen you and appointed you for the specific purpose that you will bear fruit. And not just any fruit. Not poor quality fruit. Not fruit that will rot after a day or so. Jesus has chosen you so that you will bear fruit that will last.

The one question which I forgot to ask

The one question which I forgot to ask over 30 years ago:

Am I producing fruit that will last?

Now we could get all long and involved about what this “fruit” really means, but let’s keep this simple. It certainly includes the fruit of your personal life, and it most definitely includes the fruit of your ministry. We’ll get into these in later sections.

But to get your creative juices flowing, have a look at the next two chapters.

Appendix 6: Bibliography

Student Ministry for the 21st Century Bo Boshers with Kim Anderson. Willow Creek / Zondervan

Purpose Driven Youth Ministry Doug Fields. Zondervan

The Lost Art of Disciple Making Leroy Eims.
Zondervan / NavPress

FOR LEADERS:

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