

# Depends.

by Tim Eldred

**TAKE5 is . . .**  
Your five-minute refresher,  
a "quick read" for Network members  
focusing on spiritual growth, resources,  
and the mission of youth ministry.

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## Calendar

### • Paradise

May 25, 2008

Paradise, Kansas

[www.paradise08.com](http://www.paradise08.com)

PARADISE is a journey to awaken students from every part of the body of Christ to the supremacy of God's Son, to call them to adore Him as King, and to inspire them to arise to bravely join Him in accelerating His kingdom purposes for this generation, converging in a national worship gathering on May 25, 2008, convened at the geographic center of the nation.

In God we trust. Sounds good on paper. Rolls off the tongue. It will preach. But do we? Really? That question haunts me lately. Do I trust God? Depends.

Like most of you, I have spent my life investing in young people. Embarrassingly, I have too often forsaken my wife, my sons, and yes, my relationship with God, for the sake of youth ministry. I am sure I'm not alone.

As I approach forty, I find myself in a different place than I have ever been. Getting tired. Going bald. Losing my hearing. Learning to trust. It's a good place to be. Now, I'm looking back and wondering: What would I do differently if I had those twenty years of youth ministry back?

I would work less.

Yes. Less. If you're like most youth leaders I know, you have all the answers. That's your job. You have to know what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and do it right the first time. And if you don't possess that ability, you have to at least look like you do. Your job depends on it.

What happens when we have all the answers? We get the credit. It's true. Seriously, I like credit. Validation is my friend, and I can use all the friends I can get. Honestly, in some ways I am no different today than when I was a kid. I need to be needed. I need to know someone depends on me.

What do we need young people for today? We need them to come to church. We need them to come to programs. We need them to come to Jesus. We need young people. Our job depends on them.

The Apostle Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, "Don't let anyone put you down because you're young. Teach believers with your life..." (1 Timothy 4:12 – The Message). That's hard advice for today's teen. Why? No one depends on young people – not even the church.

**I have too often forsaken my wife, my sons, and yes, my relationship with God, for the sake of youth ministry.**

I was flying home this past winter on a short flight from Cleveland to Detroit. There were a whopping eight people on the flight, and sitting next to me was a Muslim man. He looked tired. I knew the signs of a weary world traveler and felt his exhaustion. "Where have been?" I inquired. "Mecca." He replied. "Just returning from the pilgrimage." We had a delightful conversation. I made a friend.

Before wheels touched down in the Motor City, I asked the most important question I have ever posed on a plane. "If you don't mind, I am curious about something." With all the sincerity I could muster, "Would you tell me why Muslim youth are more committed to their faith than Christian youth?"

He looked at me with intrigue. "I am pleased you noticed!" was his quick response. "The answer is simple. We depend on young people, and we expect them to die for their faith." Before I could comment, he continued. "Christians expect attendance and little else from youth and that's exactly what you get. Very little."

Take a deep breath, friend. Bite your tongue. Swallow hard. I did.

I was speaking at a gathering outside Portland, Oregon, a few weeks ago where I was introduced to a godly leader of great reputation, who is a few decades older than me. I have learned (the hard way) to sit down, shut up, and listen. As this man shared, I was humbled just to be at his table. God was speaking through him, and I was grateful.

In our eventual dialogue, he asked a question, "When did the church stop depending on young people?" He went on to answer, "When we stopped trusting God."



## Depends... (continued)

Which begs another question: "When did we stop trusting God in young people's lives?" Brace yourself: "When we started knowing all the answers."

By God's grace, He has allowed us to learn much about the young people we serve. The social sciences have opened doors of understanding, giving servants like you and me great insight into the youth culture. That is a gift from God. But I wonder: Does our education, experience and expertise remove our dependence?

Jesus showed up on the scene and called for Himself disciples. Young men. Young. He recruited...resourced...released. What is so interesting to me is that He chose to commission them to build the Church before they were actually ready. It's true. Not one was fully equipped (or even seminary trained). Not one. Yet, He trusted them.

The same young people Jesus Christ trusted to build the Church are in your care today. No different...same. And the same Holy Spirit that empowered them is available to them. That is a winning formula. It worked then; it works now.

Much like the story of young David, a giant is taunting the army of God today. The odds are stacked against us and the statistics render the educated, experienced experts all but paralyzed. But there is hope. A generation is ready, willing and able to do battle. They are running to the front line, picking up rocks, and warming up their arms.

But back the train up a moment.

In 1 Samuel 17:38-39, we are given a glimpse of divine revelation. God gives us a hint to our next steps as youth leaders. How the battle for this generation unfolds depends on our ability to read and respond.

Upon answering God's call to wage war against Goliath, David finds himself standing face-to-face with another potential "enemy": Saul. In an act of desperation, Saul, the educated, experienced expert, depends on a seventh grader to fight his battle.

It's a good thing the pimple-faced, pubescent kid didn't depend on Saul. "Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk, but he could hardly budge. David told Saul, 'I can't even move with all this stuff on me. I'm not used to this.' And he took it all off."

For once, I am not ashamed to admit that I am desperate enough to trust the God who trusts young people. All my



We want your feedback on TAKE 5.  
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education, experience and expertise seem to have failed (feels good to say that out loud). There's a generation depending on you and me to make room for them on the front line. Engage them. Learn from them. Trust God to work through them.

In all likelihood, they will set the bar high and lead us into battle. The veterans of Saul's army took courage when they saw God use a runt to kill a giant. Let us be thankful for weapons of the past that we have used to

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wage war, but let us not burden young people today with our expertise any longer. Let us choose to free them up, not weigh them down.

For youth ministry to produce youth in ministry, it depends on whom we trust.



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