

Book Report - Internship
The Ministry of Nurture by Duffy Robbins

Introduction

Proverbs 1:7... "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (NASB)

Proverbs 22:6... "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." (NASB)

"The bottom line in youth ministry is not how many kids you have coming to your youth group. The bottom line is, "Where will be your kids be five to ten years from now?"¹ Jim Burns

These quotes are the essence of youth ministry. Too often the consumer mentality is manifested in the "pizza and pop" entertainment of today's youth in the Church. As was illustrated by the above quotes, "pizza and pop" are not going to bring about the lasting kind of change which will carry a youth through the difficult years of Jr/Sr High School & College. What will bring about that type of change is a ministry which employs the purposes set forth in Duffy Robbins book; *The Ministry of Nurture*. The goals and methods laid forth by Robbins clearly explain the best way for a lasting faith to manifest in the lives of our youth. This book explains a Biblical and relational path to fostering first-hand faith which

¹Duffy Robbins, *The Ministry of Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 11.

will stand in all circumstances. This book outlines practical methodology to achieve these goals in a way which is easily understood and engaging at the same time. Therefore, it is the goal of this report to analyze and comment on the aforementioned methodology of Robbins' book.

Content Analysis

Section 1 - Adolescent Spirituality

Robbins begins his book with some introductory information about adolescent spirituality. Within this section Robbins highlights the goal of ministering with adolescents. He breaks this down into four well defined goals for growth: (1) Growth should be centered on a relationship with Jesus, (2) Growth should be motivated by a sense of call, (3) Growth should be guided by a mature and discerning wisdom, and (4) Growth should be encouraged and bolstered by a sense of community.

Having laid forth the goals of the book, Robbins then describes the process of implementing and teaching these principles to youth. In doing so, he provides the Biblical basis for the process of nurturing development in youth: 2 Peter 1:3-9...

Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now

for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)

He then sums up the essence of chapters 2 and 3:

That's the Biblical pattern of spiritual growth. It's not quick or easy. It takes God years to raise an oak tree, but He can make a mushroom overnight. Most of us in youth ministry have put in years of waiting on the nuts in our groups to do something. In time, perhaps they will. For now, those of us involved and committed to a ministry of nurture with teenagers need to be reminded that progress is a process.²

Section 2 - Real Life Student Discipleship

Section 2 titled "Real Life Student Discipleship" contains the bulk of "nuts and bolts" of the book. The first chapter in this section (Chapter 4) might be the most important chapter in the book as it details the necessity of fostering a "first-hand faith" in our youth. This "first-hand" faith is a faith which is an internalized faith which leads and guides the worldview of the youth in determining attitudes, thoughts, and actions. Most times our youth are simply carrying around their parent's faith and have not yet evaluated the truth claims of Christianity on their own leading to a type of faith which does not contribute greatly to an overall worldview. Robbins explains a time in his

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life when he was preparing to travel as a youth and realized he wanted to pack his own bag rather than have his mom throw everything but the kitchen sink in his luggage. This is exactly the same dynamic which takes place when a young person begins to question all the things they have been taught since their early years. Robbins elaborates on the immense importance of the youth minister's work in assisting in this "packing/unpacking/packing" process:

That is when our task as youth ministers is very important. In order to help teenagers build a first-hand faith, we must stop trying to cram beliefs in their baggage, to fill their doctrinal stockings and just expect them to carry it because we said so. Rather, we must use questions and strategies that will help them to unpack that faith baggage they've been working with, re-examine what is in there and why it is in there, and then help them to repack it. When they have packed the bag for themselves, they will be much more willing to bear its responsibilities and consequences.³

In the following Chapter Robbins put a new spin on the age-old issue of peer pressure for adolescence. This spin is directly linked to the principle of the previous chapter in that youth can be influenced in the Church by "peer pressure" leading to the second-hand faith. He is not saying it is exactly the same kind of negative peer pressure which many time results in immoral actions. Rather, he is saying that these outside pressures are motivation for action rather than internal conviction. Again, this chapter seeks reinforce the dynamics of

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the previous chapter by showing that lasting first-hand faith is internalized. He lays the foundation for this which is found in the Scriptures:

We quote Romans 12:2 and exhort students not to conform to the world around them, and they do need to hear this. But we should be careful to read the entire verse. Paul writes, "Be not conformed to this world, but let Christ transform you mind from within." The antidote to conformity to negative peer influence is "transformity" by Christ. Counselors and Sunday-School teachers who forget this fact will go awry. Any attempt to get teenagers to just say no will fail unless we recognize that teenagers will not say no to something unless they have, first of all, said a sincere and genuine yes to something or Someone.⁴

In the next chapter Robbins begins to explain how "a faith that affects the heart and the head" can be achieved. This chapter helps to establish a general path or curriculum which will help to foster the process while navigating a three year plan. This three year plan attempts to teach all the necessary doctrine and lessons which will help the youth to have a faith which is lasting and personal.

The subsequent chapter then seeks to elaborate on some teaching principles which will aid in making the curriculum of the previous chapter stick in the minds of our youth in a fashion which shapes their worldview and is not simply useless trivia:

If we are intent on helping our students develop a faith that affects the heart and the head we must help them

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review and apply the truths we teach from scripture. Otherwise, we too will be faced with teenagers who have gone through years of exposure to the Bible, and have walked away from our youth ministries with little more than Bible trivia.⁵

In the next few chapters Robbins provides some tangible and practical ideas and methods for teaching and living out the faith. Having worked with youth for many years he has many tried and true ideas and principles which provide the reader with a great springboard for implementing this type of ministry in their own congregations.

Section 3 - The Process of Nurture

Here in the final section of this book, Robbins lays out some personal relationship issues which greatly influence the overall ministry. He outlines some great practical methods to utilize youth in a way which creates the necessary relationship to be in place for nurture to occur. Five critical methods are (1) Remember Names, (2) Learn how to work through established relationships with students you know to meet new students you don't know, (3) Be an entrepreneur in servanthood, (4) don't try to be a teenager (5) use the SLIR approach (Talk about (S)chool, (L)ikes, (I)nterests, (R)eligion). Here he provides a list of simple things one can do to create a safe atmosphere for an adult to relate to a youth member. Robbins sums up the reason for this comprehensive list, "Sometimes we can facilitate that

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relational time by DOING something with a student better than we can by actually sitting down across a table with an appointment to TALK ABOUT something.”⁶

The next chapter in this section explains Robbins' philosophy of Outreach leading to Nurture and Nurture leading to Equipping. In this process Robbins lays out the way which this happens by (a) spending time with them (b) modeling Christ (c) helping them establish and deepen their commitment to God (d) call them to service.⁷ This section does an excellent job of explaining all three aspects of this process. All three are explained in detail with practical suggestions how to help our students move from one level to the next.

Section 4 - Conclusion

In this very brief summary of the well detailed information and principles of this work, Robbins “places a bow” atop the package. As was the case for the book as a whole, Robbins relates the foundation for this summary and his life's work with today's youth:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to

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be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (NASB)