

the WHOLE YOUTH WORKER

His Way



Your Way

Advice On Professional,
Personal, and Physical Wellness
from the Trenches

2nd Edition

JAY TUCKER

Foreword by Jeanne Mayo

Acclaim for *The Whole Youth Worker*

“If you are a youth worker who struggles with staying in ministry for one reason or another, reading this book will remind you that you are not alone. As you read about Jay’s experiences you will see some frustration and hurt associated with the daily task of being a youth worker. If you want to hear from the heart of a youth worker who struggles to enjoy the Monday to Friday part of youth ministry and wants to help you get through it too, then you need to read *The Whole Youth Worker*.”

—Mike Kupferer, *Youth Ministry Exchange*

“Don't let anyone fool you—youth ministry is harder than it looks! In *The Whole Youth Worker*, Jay gives us a glimpse at what it's like to be in the trenches—both good and bad. You will read this book and say, ‘Been there—it's good to know I'm not alone!’”

—Rev. Bill Fisackerly, IV,
Gulf Cove United Methodist Church

"*The Whole Youth Worker* will help guide most youth workers around the dangerous curves and out of the sinkholes of youth ministry. This short, 148-page, readable paperback, has very valuable, sensible, workable counsel that most every person who works with teenagers in an ecclesiastical setting ought to read. If you're a Senior Pastor wondering what to give your Youth Minister to help them negotiate this important work, then this is the book to get”

—Rev. Michael Philliber, PhD, *ReaderViews*

“Jay Tucker does a fantastic job giving practical advice to all youth workers. The joy and passion he holds for his career reach out and grab your attention. His fresh approach and great sense of humor will help inspire and renew your outlook on the world of youth ministry. I plan on keeping this book close at hand for years to come and I will be sharing it with many people.”

—Daniel Wilde (Nashville, TN)

“Here is a brass-tacks companion for those who would aspire to being not a master but a servant, one who is willing to put forth great effort on the young, even though not all the recipients will be appreciative. Jay Tucker is the opposite of preachy. He is practical and instructional with down-to-earth language that brings a smile.

I feel that I have met this man in person and benefited greatly by the experience. He is the genuine article, with the heart of a servant but the mind of a teacher. He knows what kids are like these days, and he loves them anyway.”

Rev. Heyward B. Ewart, III PhD,
author of *AM I BAD? Recovering From Abuse*

“Jay’s book is simple, straightforward and real. if you are a parent who is going to put your children into a youth group, read it. If you are a pastor looking for a youth leader, read it. I can tell you I know what I need to look for when it comes time for my children to spend time in a youth group.”

Jeff Murray, Melbourne FL

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PERSONAL, AND PHYSICAL WELLNESS
FROM THE TRENCHES

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BY JAY TUCKER

FOREWORD BY JEANNE MAYO

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Preface to the 2nd Edition

One of the highlights of my life was when my first book, *The Whole Youth Worker*, was published two years ago. The book came out while a very dark time in my life was beginning. I was adjusting to the first extended period of time in my life without a job since the age of fifteen. It wasn't easy to adjust to not being needed. At first, I looked at my situation as the opportunity to spend some quality time with my son. After seven months, I was ready to hurt the persons responsible for the creation of *Spongebob Squarepants*. I was more than ready to go back to work.

That opportunity came in August 2009, when I accepted a job at Nicaea Academy to teach at a small private Christian school. I was hired as a “high school” teacher which meant I was teaching six different subjects a day. Having a degree in elementary education, the idea of teaching several different subjects in a day wasn't a foreign concept. However, there is a difference in preparing for 6 lessons on the elementary level. I typically have those skills mastered! High school was a different story. I was teaching complicated subjects that I hadn't given any thought to in twenty years. *Did I really want to feed my family so bad?*

I wouldn't trade my time at Nicaea for anything. There I spent my days with some of the most amazing young people and dedicated teachers I have ever worked with. I definitely had some characters! The irreverent teenage “Sweat Hogs” from that 1970s show *Welcome Back, Kotter* had nothing on the great group of kids that I had the honor to teach on a daily basis. I

have to mention one student in my class because he was a challenging kid whom you couldn't help but love. In addition, he has the most made-for-action-movies name I've ever heard: Dare Rambo will rule the world one day.

I got a phone call around Christmas time from a great church in my town that was looking for a youth minister. After much prayer and discussion with my wife, I was reminded that youth ministry is my life's calling. I accepted the opportunity to be interviewed and was eventually honored with the position. As I write this, I am finishing up my first year at the church. I almost forgot mentioning how much I love working in the church.

That isn't to say that my present church isn't without its own set of challenges. All churches are! My current youth group consists of roughly thirty-five 5th through 12th grade students. The majority of these students are middle-school girls, a challenge that reminds me daily of the importance of prayer. I find my current position as proof positive that God has a great sense of humor.

These past two years have made me a more organized and appreciative youth worker. I wake up every morning at 6:45am to take my kids to school and return home to get ready for a new day in youth ministry. Our God is truly an awesome God!

This 2nd edition contains five new chapters and a collection of new stories that I pray will make you think, laugh, and embrace God a little more tightly.

Foreword

I'm writing this Foreword amidst the animated chatter of my family right after our holiday celebration. And though it's years after my child-rearing season, I remain eternally grateful that my primary ministry didn't begin when I drove out of the Mayo driveway, but rather, when I drove back in.

Now, over four exciting decades into the youth ministry journey, I am reveling in the endless rewards of living a Christ-centered, balanced life. Our sons both love Jesus and love us—in an indisputable and life-giving way. They both are passionately in fulltime ministry and managed to avoid the “I want to follow the Antichrist” phase during their growing up years. Their father remains my treasured “boyfriend” and the ultimate earthly hero in life. We just celebrated our 40th anniversary together at a “Vow Renewal Ceremony” that my amazing ministry team surprised us with last month. And to make my journey even more utopian, I'm now “Nana” to the two cutest grandsons in the known universe!

The precious gifts of my life are even more treasured today because of a phone conversation I had only moments ago. As I write this foreword, my mind is racing with the starkness of the contrast. You see, tonight a veteran youth pastor is announcing to his students that he is resigning his position due to “moral indiscretions.” He leaves straight from his youth service for the airport. His flight takes him to another state where his new-found “soulmate” awaits. My attempts an hour ago to change his direction seemed to be pretty

fruitless. He leaves young children in the wake of his selfishness... and a shattered, confused group of teenagers at his church.

That's why Jay Tucker's book, "The Whole Youth Worker," is such an authentic gift to youth pastors and workers. It calls us to wholeness in all arenas of our life. You see, you can "cram" for earthly exams; but you can't cram for most character ones. True tests of character usually come as "pop quizzes." So it's only through living a balanced, healthy life—spiritually, family-wise, emotionally and physically—that we can thrive long haul amidst the pressures of "doing youth ministry" while also "doing life."

As a love note to youth workers who will read these words, I'd like to pass on some simple mentoring/coaching thoughts from my vantage point of four decades in the trenches. Let me highlight a few things that you will hear echoed throughout Jay's book:

Decide what you will give to the world: A gifted man in youth ministry who is *outwardly empowered*...or a broken man in youth ministry who is *inwardly transformed*. There is a world of difference, you know. Wise leaders always choose the latter. I've watched countless youth ministry superstars "crash and burn" because charisma became a suitable substitute for character.

Remember that you'll rarely notice changes in your own spiritual life or character, no matter how sincere you are. Why? Those strategic changes *sneak up on you quietly* like weight gain—one tiny bit at a time. So be brutally honest with your own compromises, motivations, and sin. Living a Christ-honoring life isn't glamorous or media-worthy. But it's still the only thing that is celebrated in eternity.

Make a “daily appointment time” with the Lord and actually *have* a consistent devotional life instead of just preaching about it. Consistency always trumps length. So start with a daily “10 and 10” (10 minutes in the Word and 10 minutes in prayer) and build from there. I’ve never counseled a moral failure in the ministry who had even a relatively consistent devotional life—*never*.

Fight fiercely the voices in your head that will haunt you with your own failures and tell you how unworthy and fruitless you are in youth ministry. The enemy’s main battleground for you will always be in the privacy of your mind. Only you can keep choosing to “bring your thoughts into captivity.”

“How long will the mind games last?” you ask me. Well, they’re still alive and well at the 40-year-mark in my ministry. Sorry about my discouraging truthfulness. But I’ve learned to focus on only what I want to fuel. Mental discipline becomes easier as the years roll by.

If you have children, realize that they must never compete with your youth ministry. The title bestowed on the most important leader in the world today is not president, Olympic medalist, or pastor. It is *parent*. Our children are the *living messages* we send forward into a time we will probably never see. Long after ministry is a dim memory, your family will still be with you. So steward those relationships with great care. The enemy will always attempt to make the people who are the most *precious* in your life to feel the most *common*.

Prioritize *people* over *pulpits*. your youth messages will be forgotten with agonizing speed. But the teenagers in your ministry will never forget *how the Jesus inside of you made them feel*. And just remember: If

you're out of the "people business," you're really out of authentic youth ministry.

Thank God every day of your life that you *get* to do youth ministry! Studies tell us that 92% of all decisions for Christ are made on or before one's 18th birthday. That places huge destiny on what we are investing our lives into. People will rarely celebrate you and teenagers won't sing you choruses of "How Great Thou Art." But we have a purpose that is both true and eternal. Jim Elliott said it powerfully: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep... to gain what he cannot lose."

Remember that the only things that walk back from the cemetery with the mourners and *refuse to be buried* are the character of the man and his spiritual fruit. So live with the end in mind; and make Hell regret you ever decided to love some teenagers.

D.L. Moody is one of my favorites in the Christian Hall of Fame. Near his death, he said something that I've chosen as one of my own personal mantras:

"When I die, don't think I'm gone. I'll still be alive in that person... and that person... and that person."

So as you read *The Whole Youth Worker* by Jay Tucker, realize that you have chosen one of the most Christ-honoring endeavors in the universe—that of multiplying your heart for Christ into teenagers and college students in the 21st century. May you do it with such integrity and passion that your "that-person-line" will reach to the stars and back!

Lovingly Cheering For You, Jeanne Mayo
President, Youth Leader's Coach
Youth Pastor, Author, and Speaker

PART I

Working with Youth

He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:20 (*NIV*)



Hey Youth Minister, You Rock!

Ten years. That's two tours of duty, more than two Presidential terms, and long enough to get an advanced degree. I've been in full-time youth ministry for eight years. Some of you who might be reading this have put in eight years in just lock-ins alone. (I have nothing but respect, love, and admiration for you nuts that have been doing this for a decade or more.) So I am, by no means, the expert when it comes to youth ministry. All I can tell you is my journey and how I've managed to last a decade.

When I look at the statistics for youth ministry, I see that I am one of a dying breed. Lots of young men and women are getting into youth ministry, and then right back out. The main reasons seem to be stress, poor pay and little benefits, and the realization that you can't just play videogames all day and you won't ever be called "The coolest guy in the world." This is tough work. You have my permission to punch the next person right in the nose who asks, "When are you going to become a real pastor?" (Just kidding, that is hardly ever a good idea.)

Maybe some of you are currently volunteering as a youth minister, Sunday School teacher, youth rep on your church board, or the extra pair of hands. First of all, thank you. Without you, most of the ministry wouldn't get done. Now that I've said thank you, let me say something that might offend you a little. You prob-

ably don't completely understand what it's like to be the Y.M.I.C. (Youth Minister In Charge). Let me explain.

Everyone loves a volunteer. You have jobs that demand lots of your time and still you find a way to give even more time to others. Any good pastor or church board member realizes that without you, there is no church. That's why you guys get banquets and pats on the back. You deserve every one of those things and more. What you don't often get, however, is the pointed finger. You don't always get to see the "underbelly" of the church. You don't often get to take the phone calls and the "I just happened to be in the neighborhood so I thought I'd stop by and chat with you" visits to your office. You're the volunteer, and the church usually feels lucky to have you.

Sometimes things change when a paycheck becomes attached to a ministry. I've been in both positions. I've been the volunteer who dreamed of earning a living doing this youth ministry thing. I've also experienced the reality of being a professional minister. They are two different worlds, trust me. As a paid staff member, you often see another side of the church. You sometimes see your pastor act more like a corporate boss than a spiritual leader. Occasionally, you hear the "sweet little old church lady" inform you that the last guy had more kids in his group. Monday through Friday, most churches are businesses with deadlines and meetings. (Lots of meetings.) What happened to water balloons, fart machines, and pizza all day, every day?

Having said that, let me tell you the one thing that makes this job the best thing you can do with your time. Every once in a while, you get to introduce someone to Jesus. Every once in a while, you get to expe-

rience the joy of a life changed and a soul saved. That makes it all worth it!

I still love Wednesday nights. Nothing jacks me up more than spending time with young people. When I lose that excitement, I'll get out. No one will have to tell me it's time to hit the road, I will already have headed towards the door. There is something indescribable about what happens in your soul after one of your teens hugs you, and tells you how much they appreciate you. (Getting called a dork and having stuff poured on you is the same as a hug in teen-world). Those moments will help you put up with the rest of the crap.

Those types of things have happened often in my career. I thank God for them because there have been times when I have been close to turning in my walking papers. I have had my share of pity parties when I felt under-appreciated. There was a time not too long ago when I began to question my sanity for sticking with this profession. Not even an hour later, I got a message on our youth group MySpace page that saved my career for the day.

“I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciate you. I know it seems like sometimes we aren't listening to you. But we are. My best friend has been coming to church now for a few weeks and she wants to keep coming. Thanks for putting up with us.”

How often does Donald Trump hear that in his day?

