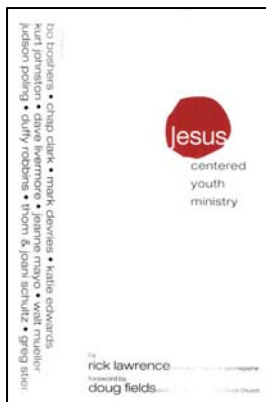


**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Contact:** Ben Laurro, Pure Publicity  
818.753.4056 or [Ben@purepublicity.com](mailto:Ben@purepublicity.com)

## Is Today's Youth Ministry Really Jesus Focused?

The world's top youth leaders seek to strip down layers of trends and tradition toward life-changing ministry techniques centered on Jesus



**Denver, CO.** — Youth workers in churches across America have tried everything to point students toward Jesus—from events and concerts to video games and lock-ins to MySpace—but is it working? Are students really following Jesus, or programs designed to look like it?

During the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) frenzy in the late 90's, Rick Lawrence, the veteran editor of the youth ministry Group Magazine, found himself struggling with a “fake” Jesus too often portrayed to youth in churches across America. “I was startled by how the real Jesus was so consistently offensive to my American Christian sensibilities, ‘inalienable rights’ and everyday self-absorbed behaviors,” Lawrence said.

When the excitement of the latest ministry methods and ideas faded, Lawrence became “passionately bored.” He realized the driving force of ministry—Jesus—had become secondary. In *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry* (Group Publishing), Lawrence and the top voices of youth ministry leaders from across the world discuss what a truly Jesus-centered ministry will look like in every area, from mentoring to outreach to engaging culture.

“Today’s teenagers are just not getting who Jesus really is, or they’ve not getting enough of who he really is, or they’re getting, literally, a fake Jesus. As a result, few of them are living passionately with Christ in their everyday lives,” Lawrence says. But what’s the other way?

It involves deconstructing the false Jesus embedded into kids’ hearts and minds, and reconstructing and reintroducing them to the real Jesus. Inspired by the British theologian C.H. Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers,” Lawrence offers youth workers what Spurgeon called “making a beeline to Christ,” where “every text in Scripture there is...a road to Christ.”

“I believe Spurgeon’s passion for Jesus is really the central—but unexplored—imperative in youth ministry today,” Lawrence says. “We’re in need of radical right now, and this injects it into kids’ spiritual DNA. Centering on Jesus changes forever how they view Scripture study, mission trips, service projects, games, retreats and their everyday lives. It enables them to find Jesus—or the kingdom of God he describes—everywhere they look.”

According to Lawrence, the deconstruction touches leaves no stone unturned. Many of the methods youth ministries employ—like Christian music—may even be damaging if the messages aren’t about the authentic Jesus. *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry* includes input from top voices in youth ministry, including Chap Clark, Mark Devries, Walt Mueller and Dave Livermore, who offer introductions to the hot-button issues in youth ministry:

- How to Center Ministries Around Jesus: Discipleship, Mentoring, Evangelism, Small Groups, Outreach, Counseling, Volunteers, Parents, Communication.
- Revealing statistics and insight into what teenagers really believe about their faith.
- Engaging the Culture: How Engagement Beats Out Accommodating or Alienating

###

Through it all, *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry* seeks to go back to the roots of the faith. “I’m convinced that we’ll recover our own life and our youth ministry vision and practice when we return to the center of all things, Jesus Christ,” Lawrence says.

**Rick Lawrence** is the editor of *Group Magazine* and the executive editor in charge of Group Publishing's youth ministry training events, including Group Magazine Live and two web sites, [www.groupmag.com](http://www.groupmag.com) and [www.ministryandmedia.com](http://www.ministryandmedia.com). He is the author or co-author of hundreds of magazine articles and books, including *The Family-Friendly Church* and *TrendWatch*.

### **About *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry***

*Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry* by Rick Lawrence. Published by Group Publishing. Paperback, 176 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0764435041

###

# Interview Questions for Rick Lawrence

Author of *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*

1. What is the current state of youth ministry today? Is it healthy or unhealthy?
2. Has too much importance been placed on entertaining kids in youth ministry rather than fostering true spiritual connection and growth?
3. What is *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*? How is it different from other methods?
4. What is “the beeline imperative”? How does it affect youth ministry?
5. What are some of the common misconceptions today’s youth have about Jesus?
6. How can misconceptions of Jesus be deconstructed and reconstructed?
7. What’s happened to the term “Christian” in the United States?
8. Are Christian teens behaving or living any differently than non-Christian teens?
9. You write about concerns over Christian music and other forms of communication that may be distorting truths about the authentic, biblical Jesus. Could you explain this? How can youth ministers monitor appropriate media?
10. Is the Christian “subculture” hurting or helping us?
11. There are three ways Christians typically engage culture—accommodation, alienation or engaging. How did Jesus engage the culture of his time?
12. How are Christian teens engaging culture? What can youth ministries do to better engage the culture at large?
13. How are youth ministries doing in evangelism? What is Jesus-centered evangelism?
14. Almost all churches have implemented “small groups.” How important are small groups in youth ministry? What is a Jesus-centered small group?
15. The teenage years are often characterized by personal crisis. How can youth workers successfully come alongside teens when crisis happens?
16. If youth leaders are burned out, how can they revive their passion for ministry?

**Rick Lawrence** is the editor of *Group Magazine* and the executive editor in charge of Group Publishing’s youth ministry training events, including Group Magazine Live and two web sites, [www.groupmag.com](http://www.groupmag.com) and [www.ministryandmedia.com](http://www.ministryandmedia.com). He is the author or co-author of hundreds of magazine articles and books, including *The Family-Friendly Church* and *TrendWatch*.

**For an interview with Rick Lawrence, contact Ben Laurro at Pure Publicity at 818.753.4056 or [Ben@purepublicity.com](mailto:Ben@purepublicity.com).**

# **Topic Ideas: *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry***

- Youth Ministry's Weakness: What Do Today's Teens Believe About Jesus?
- The Beeline Imperative: How All Scripture Points to Christ
- Deconstructing the Trojan Horse: How Some Christian Music and Subculture May Be Distorting the True Jesus
- The Game plan for Deconstruction: How Youth Ministry's Can Myth Bust the Misconceptions of Jesus
  1. Train teenagers to deconstruct Jesus' words and actions.
  2. Challenge kids with better questions about Jesus and his kingdom.
  3. Use humor and satire to expose kids' false mental models of Jesus.
- Engaging Culture: How Teenagers Can Become Fishers of Men
  1. First, we wake up.
  2. Use what's common to teenagers, but use it shrewdly.
  3. Teach them to think critically about their cultural influences.
  4. Regularly force kids to solve problems that require critical thinking.
  5. Use one of Jesus' favorite opening lines—"You have said it...but I say..."
- Filling the Jesus-Shaped Hope in Your Ministry
- Jesus-Centered Evangelism
  1. Jesus-centered evangelism is most often a marathon, not a sprint.
  2. Jesus-centered evangelism looks more like a three-stage "launch vehicle" than a pop-bottle rocket.
  3. Jesus-centered evangelism is primarily peer-to-peer.
- Creating a Jesus-Centered Small Group
  1. Create a relaxed, warm and welcoming environment for "true family."
  2. The leader's job is to lead—small groups are a "benevolent monarchy."
  3. Follow a Jesus-centered learning progression—experience, reflection, interpretation and application.

**For an interview with Rick Lawrence, contact Ben Laurro at Pure Publicity at 818.753.4056 or [Ben@purepublicity.com](mailto:Ben@purepublicity.com).**

###