



WORDS FROM
Pastor Randy

Youth Sunday . . . for many of us, it's only a memory! I still remember the days when they used to call me a "young preacher boy." As I think about it now, it sometimes offended me then. Today, I'd almost pay somebody to call me one!

Oh well, the First Baptist Youth are literally taking over this coming Sunday. It's going to be a very special day. You'll see them serving the Lord in most every area of the church life.

Isn't it great to see what God is doing in our Student Ministry! Our young people are growing in the Lord. We're proud of them. Their numbers are increasing tremendously, but as they grow numerically they are also growing deeper in the things of the Lord.

Youth Ministry is forever changing and there's nothing easy about it. It's tough to know how young people are thinking and to know how to get "in their heads" to influence them toward the things of God.

Did you know that the national average stay for youth pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention is now only 12-13 months? We've got to do better than that! Churches must learn to support rather than to criticize their youth leadership.

Have you taken time recently to encourage Brother Jeremy? He is sent from the Lord. Aren't we blessed to have him! He is already the "talk of the town" among associational youth work. He is God's man for this hour. Brother Jeremy is for real! He practices what he preaches and is busily giving great leadership to our young people. He's conservative yet conscientious. He is always asking the big question: What does God think about this?

It's great to see how God is using Brother Jeremy to put down some ground work for a strong ministry to stand upon. This process takes time, and over time will yield tremendous results.

Jeremy is very willing to meet young people where they are . . . school, malls, ball fields, and even on *Facebook* (ask your teens what it is!). When it comes to the group meetings, he's not just tacking on a little sentimental devotion at the end of a jam session. He's centering it all upon a Biblical message and seeking to train students to love God and share Him with others. He is patiently finding balance.

Many youth ministries set out to be event driven. They thrive on camps, retreats, and away trips. Everything revolves around the next "big" event whatever it may be. Other ministries are personality centered. The youth identify with someone who's cool and "with it" and that speaks their language and looks like they do. Sadly, when the "cool" youth leader leaves, so do all of the young people. Other ministries become rewards driven and leave young people asking "What's in it for me?" I am convinced that the secret is in the balance. It's not easy to maintain, but at Saks we're on the right track.

Here's one more startling statistic: Researchers are now reporting that from 67-82% of students are abandoning their faith in the collegiate years. Only about 20% of those who leave the church ever come back to the church.

It's enough to cause me to think more seriously about the great need to reach and keep young people. Could many of our conservative values and moral distinctions be only a generation away from becoming extinct?

Thinking . . .