

New and Improved?

We have lots of opinions. And our opinions shape how we view everything. Let's be honest. None of us have the luxury of objectivity. Only God does. But surely we want to strive together to see our world as clearly as possible. And as we look at our world, we realize it's better described as a movie than a snapshot. All throughout the world, God is unfolding a compelling drama and you and your students are part of it! Our worldviews seek to make sense of that drama.

As Christian leaders, our worldviews (derived through study, life experiences, influences) shape our theology (Our view of God), which drives our theodicy (How we make sense of our world). Some of us cringe at these concepts. "I just want to love students and show them Jesus," the ambitious youth leader says. We commend their heart. But can we leave our head out of it? What "Jesus" do we want to show students? And what does "love" really look like for a teenager who is desperately wrestling with the concept of God, divorce, manic hormones, and being cut from the team? Knowingly or unknowingly, our worldview affects everything we do as youth leaders.

Without a conscious effort, it's easy to sidestep good theological thinking for quick fixes in youth ministry. But we must beware of creating a perception of a god who merely exists to save the day and who has sent his son—"Quick Fix Jesus". What exactly is our youth group to be? Where are we going? How do we measure true success? And does it matter?

Robert Webber, in his book [Ancient Future Faith](#), reminds us that our theology of Church influences that way we minister with students. The church is described as the "body of Christ" and "the people of God" (see our past columns), and it/we are also called "The New Creation."

In 2 Corinthians 5.17, Paul states, "... If anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." "If anyone is in Christ..." In other words, "Everyone who is in Christ" is a new creation.

A "New Creation". What's that? It's a description of the renewing work God is doing through Christ in you and your students.

"The old has gone and the new has come". Paul continually emphasizes our "already-not yet" status as followers of Jesus. Positionally, we are completely new before God ("Already"). Presently, we are in process, becoming what God has declared us to be ("Not Yet"). Therefore the "old" (dead, sinful, imperfect, ungodly) person is "going away" and being replaced or redeemed by the "new" (alive, faithful, godly) person. God gives us hope that transformation is occurring. We often see this in our students, sometimes in dramatic (manic!) ways, and sometimes, we don't see it at all (or until long after graduation!). But together, we will someday be an entirely "New Creation" as God completes his restoration of us along with all that He created.

But if we could step back from "anyone" and move toward seeing "everyone" for a moment, what might the going of the old and the coming of the new look like in our church- The New Creation? How might we, as leaders, attempt to see the sanctifying work of The New

Creation? What is God weeding out? Where do we see the fruit of the Spirit embraced in our community of believers? Is there more unity or less? Are we more of a redemptive force or less? More love or less? Greater expectation or less? Greater compassion or less? All of a sudden we find ourselves liberated from numbers and programs as the litmus test of health and we start asking ourselves, The New Creation, "Are we becoming what God has declared us to be?"

For some, this might be a big stretch, because church is treated as a necessary evil. We've all heard it. "I've got Jesus and a few close friends; but you can keep the church." Biblically, we cannot embrace this option. We derive our faith and spiritual growth through the church. Our personal growth cannot be separated from our growth together. To respond to the grace of God is to submit to the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ and to tie my line with others who have done the same.

Imagine a teenage boy coming to the conclusion that he cannot walk the Christian life alone without the support of his community of his friends and family. Imagine a teenage girl feeling the freedom to share her struggles with an eating disorder because she knows her community of believers would own her struggle as their struggle. Imagine youth leaders seeing their role more than 'sponsors' but older brothers and sisters in Christ who have much to give, but just as much to learn from their younger teenage brothers and sisters. Imagine parents taking family's relationship with Jesus Christ just as seriously as their "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ. Imagine a community of believers adjusting their lives to better reflect the Christian life lived out together rather than merely fitting church into their super-sonic schedules. May we be the front row cheerleaders for this type of thinking and living!

A new and improved worldview changes everything. Church is no longer a place where I go... it's what I am part of. Faith becomes more than an individual decision, but a commitment to a community where I can grow. Our desire for kids at our youth meetings then, is no longer for numbers, for self-ego, or for merely an alternative activity. Instead, our passion is centered on the fact that we, yes we, together with our students, are The New Creation. We are committed to seeing the old going and the new coming, in each other, together. The church is essential, not optional. It's growing, not standing still. This puts a whole new spin on the "new and improved" church. We are The New Creation. God has ordained it.