



SEVEN
REASONS
YOU SHOULD
LEAVE YOUR
YOUTH MINISTRY POSITION

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

— Romans 11:29

“There are times when the actual experience of leaving something makes you wish desperately that you could stay, and then there are times when the leaving reminds you a hundred times over why exactly you had to leave in the first place.”

— Shauna Niequist, Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace,
and Learning the Hard Way

MOST OF US begin Youth Ministry with the intent to stay put. Sometimes it is regarded as preparation for begin a “real Pastor.” One thing every Youth Pastor and Youth Worker shares in common though is a love and burden for teens. We desperately long to see God move in their lives and we hope to be able to be a part of it.

Discerning the call to ministry is difficult. Discerning the call to a particular church to minister can be even more so. Perhaps the most difficult situation to discern however is when to leave the position you are currently serving in.

It is my deepest desire at The Longer Haul to help you build a ministry that you will never want to leave. I long to see Youth Pastors plant their lives in a healthy ministry and minister long term to a church’s teens. That said, there are reasons to leave a position. These are important reasons and should not be ignored. Whether you are in a season now where you are struggling to know whether to leave or not you need to know these. Here are seven reasons to leave your Youth Ministry position.

1. When you're asked to leave

There are few things more painful than being asked to leave a position you've poured yourself into; leaders, parents, and students you've invested in. The circumstances leading to the request to leave seem to matter little. The pain felt is very, very real.

A ministry is a job like no other. In it we invest our very souls and share our very lives. Youth Ministry brings with it homes filled with teens, late night talks about "real life," and much more. We watch as the students in our ministries move from children to young adults. Ministry is very personal.

Many times those asking you to leave have no clue what really goes on in your ministry. They know very little of the heartache you feel for the students you serve; the sleep you lose over the teens and families you love so dearly. The burden you've carried on behalf of those you serve.

All of this leaves you wanting to stand your ground and fight to stay. It makes you want to dig your heels in and demand to be fired. This almost always causes more damage than you could realize. Leave gracefully. If you haven't already check out "[When You Want To Stay And Can't](#)" on [TheLongerHaul.com](#).

2. When your health is suffering

Ministry is more stressful than anyone could ever imagine. I often joke (but I'm serious) if anyone knew what ministry was really like, no one would ever do it. Ministry is far from a job with office hours. There are rarely times that you are not feeling the weight and burden of someone under your care. The pace that we often run in ministry, the stress we are often under, the constant criticism, and the little encouragement can take a toll on us.

This can often lead to heart issues, lack of sleep, anxiety, depression and more. If you are not leading from a place of physical health you will not be able to give your best. Additionally, it can be dangerous. As with anything, just because you are struggling with your health does not mean you should automatically leave. It does however serve as a warning sign to evaluate your present status in your ministry. If you cannot address and get a handle on your health while ministering, it may be time to step away. This may require some time off rather than altogether leaving. If your health is really struggling though it must be addressed. If this is you, check out ["Leading on Empty" by Wayne Cordeiro](#).

3. When your spiritual walk is a wasteland

There is a great danger in ministry. There is a greater danger still in a teaching and preaching ministry. Being upfront and seen carries with it the pressure to “have it all together.” Consistently studying the Word of God to teach it can be super rewarding. Much can be learned personally from your weekly study. The danger in this of course is that it can slowly creep in and completely replace your own **personal** walk with Jesus.

The (honest) and scary part of Youth Ministry is that most of what we do can be done without Jesus. We can plan games, activities, retreats, and camps. We can have lock-ins (you’ll never convince me Jesus is in those), attend ball games, ballets, middle school band concerts (okay, maybe you can’t do this without Jesus), and even water polo matches all without depending on Jesus. Don’t get me wrong, we shouldn’t...it is just that we can.

We can get really comfortable. We can get in a routine of doing Youth Ministry. Before we know it, we’ve all but given up on our own walk. We still look the part, act the part, and talk the part. We’re just fake. There is no need to sacrifice your soul for the sake of ministry. You can’t minister effectively without a solid walk. If your spiritual walk is struggling check out [“When I Don’t Desire God” by John Piper](#).

4. When you fall morally

This one may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised. This one is also very related to the previous point. Moral failure is almost always (probably always) preceded by a weak or nonexistent personal walk. You must actively fight to protect your ministry. You must work hard to stay above reproach.

When there is a moral failure there are often excuses made. In some cases, even those who were underneath the ministry of the one who fell will make excuses. Johnny Hunt has said that, "God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line." While this is true and God can certainly use those who fall or are fake, this doesn't mean it is okay to continue without addressing the failure.

Unlike others in this list that simply call you to evaluate, this one is pretty straight forward. If you fall morally, seek help, repent, and allow God to restore and rebuild. Doing so WILL require you to step away from ministry.

5. When your family is at risk

You cannot and should not put your family or marriage on the altar of ministry. If your family falls apart your ministry will also. In some cases it works the other way around as well. I've seen ministries implode because of unsupportive spouses. I've also seen many more families implode because of ministry.

Much is made of “balancing family and ministry.” Honestly, I think it is a myth. I do not believe there is such a thing as balancing family and ministry. One will always win out over the other at any given time. The truth is, sometimes your family needs more of your attention than your ministry. Other times your ministry needs more time than your family.

If your family is at risk by all means, step away if needed. The students in your ministry will come and go. Youth Ministry after all is a transitional ministry. Your family will (should at least) always be there. You must minister to your family first and foremost.

For help on managing this balancing act check out “[Balancing Family and Youth Ministry](#)” on [The Longer Haul Youth Ministry Podcast](#).

6. When God genuinely calls you

This should be the most obvious one on the list. It is certainly the one most often cited for leaving. Personally, I'm not sure though it is honestly the reason most leave. We seem to blame God for things that aren't his fault and give Him credit for a lot that He didn't do.

To be fair, discerning God's call to leave and go to another position can be difficult. There are some things I think though that should be considered in discerning whether or not God is calling away. These aren't hard lines to draw and are by no means all encompassing. These just seem to be present more often than not.

First, God always seems to call you to something and not away from something. Second, God often seems to call you to something when you're not expecting it. Third, God's call usually comes when you don't want to leave. Fourth, God seems to call you to something you feel is beyond your capacity. And finally, God's call is always accompanied with a confidence.

I'm not sure that leaving should ever be easy. Going however is another matter altogether...if that makes sense.

7. When you're not called to Youth Ministry after all

This is a tricky one. Every Youth Pastor loves Youth Ministry (most days). There are some commonalities I have found in conversations with countless Youth Pastors. Most loved their own time in “Youth Group.” God often showed up in their life in a very real way during their teen years. They loved their Youth Pastor growing up. They thought Youth Ministry would be fun and rewarding.

All of these can totally be true. I certainly hope these things are true of the students who come through our ministry! The danger here is that while these things are great, they do not necessarily equate a calling to Youth Ministry. Many Youth Pastors realize after becoming a Youth Pastor that they were never really called to vocational ministry.

If you are not 100% certain of your call to ministry you will not last. I've heard it said that Satan can't take your ministry, he will only take away the joy in it. Once he does, you will gladly give it up yourself.

Can I confess something to you? I quit Youth Ministry often. Then I wake up the next morning and go back. The certainty of my calling is what has ultimately kept me in ministry over the years. If you are unsure of your calling to vocational leadership check out [“Is God Calling Me?” by Jeff Iorg](#).

THE FACT IS, knowing when to leave can be messy. Most of the time it isn't very clear. There are a lot of things in ministry that seem to tell us to run. There is however SO MUCH value in staying put and investing your life into a church for the longer haul (see what I did there?).

It is my sincere desire to help you build a Youth Ministry that you won't want to leave. There is potential for real joy, satisfaction, excitement, and love in your ministry. I'm going to help you build it.