

ENTERING INTO CRISES REDEMPTIVELY

When you signed on as a youth minister, you placed yourself in the path of crises—both small and daunting. It's all part of the deal. In fact, most of the best impact you'll have in your ministry happens during crisis situations. That's when kids need a prepared, focused, engaged, and loving ally. That's when they're powerfully open to God's healing surgery.

When tragedy stalks your church or community, how can you be sure your kids—and you—will be ready? Youth pastor Chris Perry got sucked into the chaos and grief surrounding a Jonesboro, Arkansas school shooting because the shooter—a middle school boy named Mitchell Johnson who was a member of his youth group—killed four classmates. Here's what Chris says about entering into crises with redemptive purpose:

- Does your youth group act as a safety net? "That means two things: 1) If hurting teenagers come to our group, can they fall into our safety net—our ministry? and, 2) Can God trust us with hurting kids?"
- Create a "spiritual immunity system" in your group. "First, we must develop an awareness of the critical needs of teenagers' faith in the context of their normal everyday struggles—in order to preclude major problems. I'm working to develop in our young people 'Matthew 9 eyes'—eyes full of compassion. It means having compassion eyes when you are in the crisis. It means act out 1 John 4:16-17: 'God is love...As he is, so are we in this world.' "
- Teenagers need to know that they can make a difference in the midst of a crisis. "Mitchell's brother Monte was also in our group,

and Monte wasn't sure if the group would accept him after his brother killed four of their classmates. The group responded by welcoming him with applause. They had to answer some important questions: Can Monte come here and be influenced; can we make a difference in his life? Can his life be redirected in such a way that honors God and actually brings about what is good upon the earth? It's Genesis 50:20: What Satan meant for evil, God meant for good."

- If you walked into a crisis ministry opportunity, would you be viewed as a stranger or a familiar friend? "I think this is extremely crucial for youth pastors. If we walk up to a student or a teacher and say, 'Hi, my name is John Doe, and I care and am here to help,' it's too late. You've missed the ministry. Rather, it should be, 'Hey, man, it's me. Are you doing okay? Let's go talk.' There's a radical difference."