

THE TEST OF TIME

2013 marks my 25th year in full-time junior high ministry. As you can imagine, a lot has changed in the field since 1988. Here are a few biggies I've witnessed:

- **Technology**—We've moved from phones attached to walls to "smart" phones that are basically computers. We've moved from handwritten notes to email to social media, which has moved from MySpace to Facebook to Twitter to Instagram. Kids have instant access to connectivity we never dreamed would exist, and new technology is always emerging.
- **Über-parents**—So-called "helicopter parents" are consumed by their children's "needs." Their world revolves around their kids, and they expect yours—and the church's—to follow suit. Highly involved parents often maintain high expectations of your ministry.
- **Decreasing Christian worldview**—Back in the day, it was safe to assume that most junior highers who walked into church had some sort of built-in Christian worldview. Most had a basic understanding of Scripture and some sense of biblically based right and wrong, whether they realized it or not. This is no longer the case.
- **Faith abandonment**—The problem of teenagers walking away from God after graduation may be on the rise...or we just may be paying more attention to it now.

Either way, our awareness is causing us to evaluate how to curb this trend.

- **Moral decay**—Name your concern, and its "slope" has likely gotten more slippery during the past quarter-century.

Even in the midst of all these changes, much of what made for a healthy junior high program in 1988 is exactly what's essential today. A few constants:

- **Relational ministry is the name of the game.** Caring adults spending time with kids never goes out of style. Ministry will always be about relationships.
- **You can't do it alone.** As a rookie, I had amazing volunteers who poured their hearts into our group. We didn't have much training, but we had each other. Today, despite more resources than we can possibly tap into, we *still* need each other. Teamwork passes the test of time.
- **Junior highers are still junior highers.** Sure, they come packaged a little differently now, and their world has changed markedly. But the core components of young teenagers remain virtually the same. Struggles with identity, peer pressure, family, and friends? The same. Wrestling through puberty, insecurity, and school? The same. Fun-loving, highly energetic, and passionate? The same. Worth every moment we get to spend with them? The same. ●