

the youth ministry survival guide

by Len Kageler

Reviewed by Andy Castle

I was keen to read this book because the strapline caught my attention, 'how to thrive and last for the long haul'. I have been wondering for some time how we can help more leaders stay committed to youth ministry and somehow adapt to the pressures and challenges that this ministry offers so that, in return, we can see youth ministry being more fruitful.

Kageler writes from an American perspective, where it seems that it is not uncommon for youth pastors to be either fired or burnt-out. Fortunately the situation isn't as drastic in the UK yet, but I am sure we are all aware of statistics which suggest that youth ministers do not stay very long in one post so this book helps to address the issues and to help youth ministers survive.

The book starts by looking at nine benefits of staying in one church for a good length of time, which include the joy of seeing young people grow up, lower stress and that things get easier and take time. Whilst I'm not sure I quite agree with all of these points, nothing can compare to the privilege of seeing a young person through all their teenage years.

If we are to be healthy leaders we need to have a good understanding of who we are and how we function. There is a useful chapter on understanding our personality and the other chapters are peppered with reflections on how our differing personalities and passions can have an effect on how we handle situations that we find ourselves in.

The book looks at how youth ministers can keep healthy boundaries, recommending that we carve out time for our families and making sure that we have good, useful accountability structures in place. The chapter on empowerment also starts by saying that before we can empower others we need to be empowered ourselves. This involves being strong in personal organisation and administration and developing a reputation of reliability. As Kageler points out, 'if your word isn't good enough, the credibility of your ministry will suffer.' The rest of the chapter then contains some really helpful advice on empowering young people by getting them involved in leading and decision making, as well as empowering adults by valuing them and making sure that you clearly explain each task that you are expecting them to carry out.

I found the chapter on working positively with your pastor and other church leaders helpful as it reminds us to consider not only the importance of differing personalities but also the importance of respect in our relationships and the need for integrity in all we do. This is echoed in the chapter on keeping parents on side and informed, where Kageler emphasises that the quicker we get the parents on board with what we are doing, the quicker our ministry can grow and be fruitful.

Youth ministry can be exciting, rewarding and exhilarating, but it can also be exhausting, hard work and lonely. This book goes some way to make sure that we protect ourselves from the latter and experience more of the former.

